

DO IT YOURSELF

HERE ARE TIPS FOR COMPLETING do-it-yourself maintenance and repair projects at your communities from syndicated columnist Gene Austin.

Q. We installed windows a few years ago and sealed them tightly as directed. As a result, heavy condensation has been forming on the windows and mildew is growing under them. What's wrong and how can we stop this?

A. This problem is not uncommon in buildings that have been tightly sealed with energy-saving improvements. In some cases, the building is so tight that there are no gaps or cracks to allow moisture-laden indoor air to escape. The trapped moisture condenses on any cold surface, often windows. This is comparable to when eyeglasses fog up when you enter a warm house on a cold day. The remedy is to provide outlets for the moist air, generally by using ventilating fans in bathrooms, kitchen and laundry rooms, where moisture production is high. Make sure the clothes dryer, central heater, range and any flame-type heaters are properly vented to the outdoors. In some cases, dehumidifiers might be needed to wring some of the moisture from the air.

Q. Some bedroom doors in our apartment are giving us problems. One won't close fully in winter, but is OK in summer. Another won't close well in summer, but is OK in winter. A third works fine year-round. What is going on?

A. These mysterious door problems are symptoms of a common property of wood: it expands and contracts as the relative humidity changes. When humidity is high, wood expands; when humidity is low, wood shrinks. The swelling and shrinkage occur across the grain of the wood, so in the case of doors it could affect the width slightly. Swelling is most common in summer, when humidity is often very high, and shrinkage usually occurs in winter. Swelling and shrinkage are often not much of a problem in wood that is well-finished on all surfaces because the finish inhibits the absorption and drying of moisture that causes the problem.

It is possible that the problematic doors are unfinished on some surfaces, possibly the top and bottom edges. Wait until each door is performing as it should, then remove it from its hinges and check for unfinished edges. Seal these with a couple of coats of shellac, then give the entire door an additional coat of paint or varnish to help protect it from moisture.

Q. After having problems with staining, we had fungus-resistant shingles installed on the roof. The shingles contain copper granules, and to our dismay we discovered later that copper released by the fungus-resistant shingles can cause severe corrosion



Tightly sealed windows can cause excessive condensation.

to aluminum rain gutters. Would the zinc strips sometimes recommended for fungus protection have the same effect on aluminum gutters?

A. A chemical reaction called galvanic corrosion occurs between some dissimilar metals, and copper seems to be a leading culprit. However, zinc is often used to plate steel (also known as galvanizing) to protect it from corrosion. Even aluminum is sometimes given a zinc coating to reduce corrosion. Shingle Shield, a leading dealer of zinc strips for roofs, says: "Zinc and aluminum are adjacent on the electro-chemical scale. . . The fact that zinc and aluminum are so close indicates that there would be little or no problem even if they were to come in direct contact. . ."

Also, aluminum gutters are generally given a baked-on coating to protect them from corrosion. None of this is to say that zinc strips will never have some effect on aluminum gutters. Readers who know otherwise are encouraged to contact me.

Questions and comments should be e-mailed to Gene Austin at doit861@aol.com.

Cool Savings on Hot Water

ONE WAY TO REDUCE ENERGY consumption and operating expenses during the summer is to lower swimming pool and hot tub temperature settings. The American Red Cross recommends 78 degrees Fahrenheit as the optimal swimming pool temperature. This adjustment can mean significant savings for pools typically set to 80 degrees and higher. Try turning the heater off altogether during warm summer months. Similarly, try setting hot tubs to 96 degrees during hotter months and no higher than 102 degrees during cooler months.

Source: www.energystar.gov/MultifamilyHousing