



Maintenance and repairs

Once you decide to repair your leaking property, it is important to get expert help to plan and undertake repair work properly.

As a homeowner it is also important to undertake routine maintenance, because not doing so can contribute to leaking problems. This can result in a smaller settlement during the dispute resolution process, on the basis that the homeowner contributed to the problem by not maintaining the house properly.

1 ROUTINE HOUSE MAINTENANCE

The Building Code sets out the expected lifetimes of the different components of a house, which rely on a certain level of maintenance being undertaken in that time.

There are various things that you can and should do to maintain your house, such as:

- clearing all gutters, downpipes and balcony drains of blockages so that rainwater can drain away quickly
- inspecting roofs for areas of corroded roofing material that could allow water to enter
- repainting cladding at intervals recommended by the paint and/or cladding manufacturer to maintain an impervious coating
- keeping the dirt level in gardens below the bottom edges of cladding to prevent moisture soaking up inside the cladding.

A comprehensive booklet called *Maintaining your Home* is published by BRANZ Ltd and is available from BRANZ, building supply shops and bookshops.

2 MITIGATING DAMAGE IF YOUR HOUSE IS LEAKING

If you discover that your home is leaking, it is important to mitigate the damage until permanent repairs can be made.

- If you can find out where the moisture is getting into the house, try to block any leaks temporarily, but don't rely on a temporary repair for too long.
- Lower the levels of dirt in gardens alongside the house to at least 150 mm below the bottom edge of the cladding to help keep dry the bottom plate timbers in a wall.
- Temporarily seal cracks in monolithic claddings (such as fibre cement, stucco or plaster over polystyrene).
- Temporarily reseal windows where necessary. Some poorly installed windows rely on silicone sealants to maintain weathertightness, but these sealants deteriorate with 5 years in the sun.

3 SCENARIOS FOR REPAIRING A LEAKY HOUSE

Organising permanent repairs to your house requires careful thought about each step, for example, identifying moisture in the walls and its source, and designing and supervising repairs.

Fixing problems so that they do not recur can involve quite extensive repairs.

There are no general rules on repairs as every house is different. The scope of repairs should reflect the design of your house, as well as the leaking problems. This scope needs to be developed by an experienced building professional, preferably with experience in remedial work for leaky buildings. For names of experts in this area, visit the New Zealand Institute of Building Surveyors (NZIBS) website at www.nzibs.org.nz

Repairing the damage could involve some or all of the following work.

- Windows – If the windows have been installed incorrectly without flashings, they usually have to be removed and re-installed with the correct flashings and sill tape. This will often damage interior wall coverings.
- Cladding – If fibre-cement claddings have been installed without control joints that allow the sheets to move, the cladding often needs to be removed (in part or along entire faces) so that the sheets can be refitted with the appropriate joints in place.
- Cladding – Replacing decayed framing timber can require the removal of cladding up to 1 m from the boundaries of the decay. Removal of cladding can also result in damage to internal wall linings such as Gib board, and these may have to be replaced.
- Cavity – The council may require that a cavity be installed along some or all facades as a condition of the building consent for the repair. This will happen if the cladding is a high-risk cladding such as fibre-cement, and the design features of the house are also deemed high risk by the council. If a cavity is required and there is not one there already, all existing cladding must be taken off and new cladding installed over the cavity.
- Balcony – Balustrades damaged by rot usually have to be demolished and rebuilt. If you have a balcony where you suspect the balustrades are damaged by water, be aware that rot will have reduced their structural strength. Avoid the area and get an expert to inspect it.
- Decking – If a deck is leaking where it meets the house, the deck's waterproofing membrane will probably have to be lifted and re-laid. Cladding adjacent to the deck may also have to be replaced to ensure a watertight seal between deck and wall.

The repair work must be done thoroughly and professionally if it is to protect the house in future. Doing the work thoroughly can mean considerable disruption during repairs. Conversely, some repair proposals may be cheaper and less intrusive, but could also be inferior in quality and may leak again.

4 ORGANISING AN EFFECTIVE REPAIR CONTRACT

Organising an effective repair contract requires a 'scope of works', which is a full description of what needs to be done. This includes drawings of the important details and a contract with a builder to ensure you get what you are going to pay for. It is important to seek professional help with this.

There are four main steps.

- 1 Specification – Define what has to be done as precisely as possible, using as many drawings as you consider necessary. Use the specification to define the quality of the building materials you want used, for example, treated timber rather than untreated timber. Use an impartial expert like an architect or building surveyor to help you with this, even if you feel comfortable that a builder you know can both design and carry out the repairs. You are better to use your builder to do the work, but to use the impartial expert to do the detailed drawings and to write the specification.
- 2 Building consent – Get a building consent for the repair work, because your local council has experience of what has been required in other leaky building repair projects. Their building inspectors will also monitor the work to ensure it complies with the Building Code.
- 3 Building contract – Have the work done within the framework of a building contract and signed by the builder and you as the homeowner. You could talk to the expert who is drawing up the scope of works for you or a building expert about what should be in this contract. This ensures you know what it is likely to cost and that you have control over the quality of the building materials used.
- 4 Repair work – Use a building expert with experience in weathertightness to supervise the repairs (this may be the person who drew up the scope of works for you), because every repair job, no matter how small, will benefit from some level of expert supervision. You will have to pay for this, but it is a good way of ensuring all aspects of the work are done properly and that the risks of further leak problems are small.

5 'BETTERMENT' OF YOUR HOUSE AS A RESULT OF REPAIRS

'Betterment' refers to house repairs that make the house better, or of a higher standard, than it was when it was built. Such repairs are generally not included in settlements under the Weathertight Homes Resolution Services Act 2006 (the Act).

Betterment usually involves the use of new techniques and materials, reflecting the fact that knowledge and practice of how best to achieve the degree of weathertightness specified in the Building Code has improved significantly in recent years. The new standards are outlined in the Department of Building and Housing's weathertightness compliance document (E2/AS1), which is available at www.dbh.govt.nz/building-code-compliance-documents. This is a large file, so you may want to download only part of it.

When your house was first built, you (or the original owner) had a reasonable expectation that it would be built to the acceptable standards at the time. Courts have over the years upheld the right of owners to obtain redress if this did not happen. The same principles have been applied in adjudications under the Act.

However, courts have generally not allowed owners to receive settlements that include the cost of improvements (or betterment) that would take the house beyond the acceptable standard at the time of construction. Adjudications under the Act have generally done the same.

This means, for example, that you should not automatically expect to get your entire house reclad and repainted when repairs are only necessary to one small corner of the cladding, or to get new carpet with no allowance for normal wear and tear. It means, for example, that you may need to install treated timber in place of untreated timber.

If you think you have special reasons for recovering some or all of these betterment costs, such as that the particular work should have been done at the time of construction, you can make a case for this to the adjudicator. Every case is judged on its merits, and these things will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact your claims advisor on 0800 324 477 if you have any queries.

The Department of Building and Housing (the Department) also has information sheets on the following topics to help claimants through the claims process.

- Repairs and the resolution process
- Bringing a claim under the Weathertight Homes Resolution Services Act 2006 – information for owners of stand-alone houses, and information for owners in multi-unit complexes
- Assessing your house
- Mediation

These are available by phone on 0800 324 477 or from our website at www.dbh.govt.nz

For practical, consumer-focused information on buying, building, renovating and maintaining homes, visit www.consumerbuild.org.nz

