

CARING FOR YOUR

HOME & RENOVATION



Produced by The Master Builders Association of Victoria

Keep This Booklet Handy

This booklet is full of helpful hints which will assist in dealing with many problems you may encounter when you purchase your new home. Keep it handy – you never know when you will need to refer to it, and it will certainly help in overcoming some of the teething problems you will experience in your new home.

Front Cover – reproduced with the kind permission of Englehart Homes, Doncaster, Victoria.

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About This Publication

The Master Builders Association of Victoria is dedicated to helping the home-buying public as well as its members. To this end, the Association has produced an easy-to-follow guide to dealing with some of the problems which may be experienced once you have taken occupation of your new home.

Naturally, the House Contracts Guarantee Act 1987, which came into effect on 1 May 1988, provides protection against construction defects due to bad workmanship for a period of up to seven years after signing the contract, or the date of building approval, whichever is earlier. We have incorporated a simplified precis of the Act in an attempt to assist you to clarify your position (refer to page 20). As a member of the MBAV, your builder will have made every effort to ensure a quality construction, by employing the knowledge and skills of craftsmen and using the best materials. However, this publication is intended to assist in rectifying some of the more minor problems you may encounter which, although not serious, are nevertheless irksome.

We hope that your problems will be few but, should they occur, we are sure that the advice offered in this publication will prove invaluable.

The Association wishes you many years of joy in your new home and is happy to be of service.



A Word from MBAV's Housing Technical Services Director

Most Australians dream of owning their own home. You have turned this dream into a reality and, with a little tender loving care, you and your home may be lifelong partners. Your new home will probably be the most important and expensive personal financial transaction you will make in your lifetime. It will also be one of your best investments in terms of security and happiness, so it stands to reason that you should take every possible precaution to prevent minor problems ruining your happiness.

Prevention is always better than cure and, while your Master Builder will take care of a few continuing obligations, it is now up to you to take over and care for this assembly of materials and mechanical devices that go to make a home. You are there to **MAINTAIN** your home; the builder will rectify **DEFECTS**. Much like a car, this home will service you – and others who may one day live there – for an unlimited number of years, with proper care and maintenance.

There are over 3,000 component parts of your new home. If you have a working knowledge of some of the more important of these, it will enable you to understand more fully the usual results of use – heat, humidity, expansion, contraction – or, in other words, the normal wear and tear on your home. Of course, you should only attempt to make minor repairs; more serious problems must be referred to an expert. If in doubt contact your Master Builder, who will provide expert advice.

This booklet has been produced in an effort to help you enjoy your new home – not just today, but always. Use it and make the most of the resultant benefits.

Building Development Display Centre

If you have any building problems, or are just interested in the latest products and styles, the Building Development Display Centre at 332 Albert Street, East Melbourne [Tel: (03) 419 7488] can help you.

Open seven days a week, this free, permanent exhibition and advisory Centre allows visitors to see a wide range of building products and get unbiased, expert advice without any high pressure selling.

The Centre is in close contact with manufacturers and suppliers. This allows the Centre's staff to give accurate and up-to-date advice and information. As well as the products on display, the enquiry counter has a reference file of thousands of products and materials. Building documents such as standard contracts and specifications as well as technical publications and building books can be purchased.

Another service offered by the Centre is on-site inspections. For a small fee the Centre can arrange for a registered architect to visit your property and give you a written report on any problems that you may have. This service can also be used to inspect a house before you purchase it.

The Building Development Display Centre is open 9.00am-5.00pm weekdays and 10.00am-5.00pm weekends at 332 Albert Street, East Melbourne, 3002.

The Master Builders Association of Victoria extends its appreciation to the Building Development Display Centre for its assistance with some of the material contained in this publication.

Foundations and Footings

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Trees, shrubs and water can cause damage to the foundations of your home and may upset the footings.

Problem 1 – Trees

Planting large trees too close to your house may result in the roots cracking the foundations as a result of pressure on or under the concrete. Some trees and shrubs, because of their need for excessive amounts of water, will dry out the soil immediately surrounding them.

Solution

The easy answer is don't plant large trees near your house. If you are not sure of the size of trees already planted, it may be wise to check with your local nursery and, if you discover that the trees will grow to astronomical proportions, remove them immediately!

Problem 2 – Problems Associated With Damp

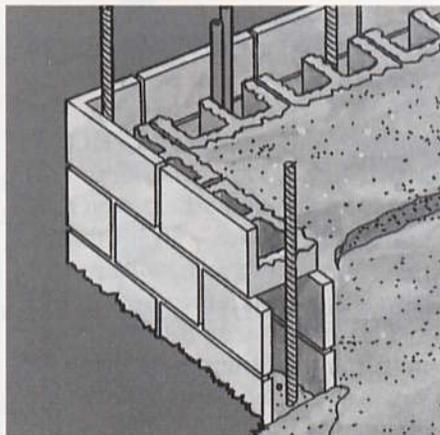
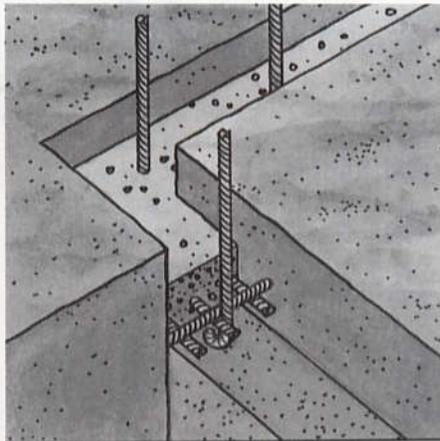
The minimum regulation requirements for underfloor ventilation may not be sufficient to ensure a problem-free sub-floor environment. In some cases as much as double the minimum regulation ventilation may be required. Insufficient ventilation in this area may produce mould, mildew or rotting floors.

Solution

Check your vents – depending on the style, size and frequency, additional vents may need to be installed in accordance with the Building Code of Australia, to improve sub-floor ventilation.

Make sure that your vents are not blocked as, obviously, they cannot work effectively if

the air flow is obstructed. Be aware that blockages may be caused not only as a result of leaves and garden rubbish, but also by a concrete pathway being laid in such a way as to



The above illustrations are reproduced from 'The Besser Masonry System' brochure courtesy of Besser Masonry Vic.

block some or all of the vents. Clearing garden debris is a simple operation but you may need to call in an expert to cut away some of the concrete pathway should this be the problem. If this should interfere with the dampcourse or clash with flooring timbers, add some half vents. Build up of garden beds can cause rising damp and reduce sub-floor ventilation.

Another area to check in order to prevent damp associated problems is drainage. Make sure that you rake the soil in a downward slope away from the house. This will eliminate depressions in which water may collect. Once again, ensure there are no blockages in your drains. Should rain result in an excess of water under your house, check ways of diverting it before it reaches the house. Check that the storm water drainage system has been designed and installed correctly.

Further problems with damp will be avoided by ensuring that garden beds are a reasonable distance away from the brick walls.

Also check leaking downpipes.

Problem 3 – Cracks in Brickwork, Surface Finishes or Footing/Raft Foundation

Both footings and concrete raft foundations form the base on which the walls rest. In contrast to the upper portion of the house, which is subject to a much greater temperature range, this area retains a fairly constant temperature. As a result of the contrasting temperature ranges, cracks may occur.

Solution

Hairline cracks are not really significant and will only require touching up if they deteriorate or detract from the appearance of your house.

Should more serious cracks appear, running diagonally from corners of windows, you must seek expert advice as this may be a sign of serious failure.

Concrete Paths, Driveways and Steps

Problem

Cracking is a common problem in concrete and impossible for your builder to prevent, as he has anticipated the stresses involved and inserted adequate joints to cope with expansion and contraction. Sometimes the area is exposed to heavier traffic than anticipated, such as furniture removal vans, and this causes minor cracks. Unequal subgrade settlement may also cause cracking in concrete.

Solution

Generally, the cracks are minor and may be repaired by the owner with a little handyman knowledge, by either placing some fresh cement or concrete into the crack (for wide cracks) or by injecting epoxy resin into the crack (for narrow cracks – mainly in walls).

One precautionary measure, if the site is sloping, is to install some surface and agricultural pipe drainage. This will reduce the flow of subsoil water and possible settlement as a result. It may also reduce washaway of lawn and garden soil as a result of extremely heavy rainfall.



The two illustrations shown are reproduced from 'Pattern Paving Through Pre-mixed Concrete' brochure. Courtesy of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association (Vic) Ltd.

Brickwork

4

Generally, little maintenance is required for brickwork. However, there are a few areas which may cause concern to those new home owners who are unaware of the facts.

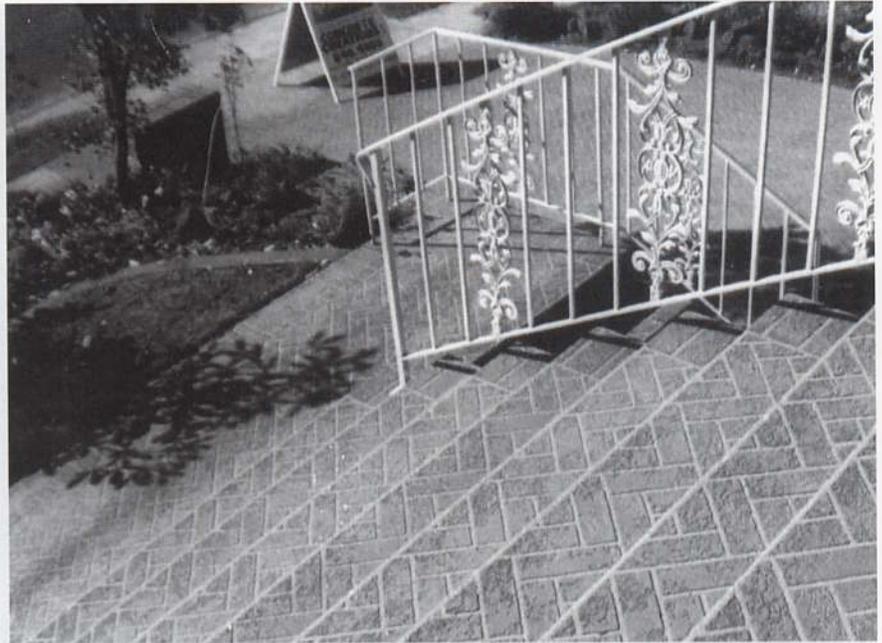
Problem 1 – Green or Yellow Stains

The green or yellow stains which sometimes appear on new brickwork are due to the presence of harmless vanadium salts.

Solution

Rain! In almost every case, these stains are soon washed off by rain. Should you wish to tackle this problem yourself, wet the wall with water and apply a diluted solution of one part oxalic acid and nine parts of water; then hose down the wall with water. Gloves should be worn as a protection against the acid.

Note: Hydrochloric acid or any solution containing caustic



soda should not be used on this type of stain.

Problem 2 – Efflorescence

Efflorescence, a white powdery substance composed of one or more crystallised soluble salts, sometimes develops on brick walls. One of the most common causes is the use of fertilisers in garden beds against the wall. During watering of the garden bed, salts from the fertilisers are drawn upwards into the brickwork by capillary attraction where there is no damp course, for instance, where the damp course has been bridged by garden soil piled up against a wall of the building.

Solution

Obviously, the best

answer is to avoid actions which may result in efflorescence. It is, however, relatively simple to remove by scrubbing with water and a stiff brush. In the case of stubborn deposits, it is best to seek the advice of your builder or brickmaker.

Problem 3 – Cleaning Brickwork

Only after years in a dust or smoke-laden atmosphere will your brickwork require major cleaning. Some contract cleaners specialise in this type of work, using a steam and water jet combined with a suitable cleaning compound to produce a very satisfactory result at a reasonable cost considering the long interval before further cleaning is required.

Smaller areas of discolouration on glazed bricks or tiles may be cleaned with a soap and water solution, with stubborn patches being removed by gentle scrubbing with a household scouring powder. Take care when selecting a cleanser to ensure that it will not erode or etch the glaze.

Timber

5

Your Master Builder has selected sizes and grades of structural timber which are more than adequate to cater for the load for which it is intended. However, a few minor problems may occur in both structural timber and door trims.

Problem 1 - Shrinkage

Although your home has been designed in anticipation of shrinkage, mouldings and trim may separate slightly at the joints. This is due to contraction or expansion of the wood which, although not adversely affected by heat or cold, may

shrink under extreme dryness or swell under extreme humidity.

Solution

The resultant cracks may be repaired easily by filling with putty or filler, after which a suitable primer should be applied followed by a coat of paint. (Painting will minimise shrinkage).

Problem 2 - Door Trim

Shrinkage may also cause separation of the door architrave at the mitre joints, resulting in cracks.



Solution

These are very simply repaired by filling with putty or filler, followed by the application of a suitable primer and a coat of paint.

Problem 3 - Door Sticking

Movement of the jamb lining may cause your doors to stick.

Solution

If the sticking is minor, try applying either a paste wax, a light coat of paraffin, or candle wax to the binding surface. Failing this, the cause may be movement of the jamb lining which should be treated by holding a block of wood against the jamb lining and tapping with a hammer. This remedy should never be used on the head lining.

Should the door continue to jamb use a plane – but plane off the sticking edge only, a little at a time, and repaint the raw edge immediately.



Both pictures courtesy of the Timber Promotion Council

Flooring

6

In most new homes, timber floors left exposed are sanded and finished with clear polyurethane coating.

Problem 1 - Worn or Dirty Floors

Timber floors which have been sanded and finished with clear polyurethane coating may be completely restored by re-sanding and re-coating of the entire

surface. In the same way, worn or dirty areas can be restored by light sanding and complete re-coating of the surface.

Problem 2 - Creaks and Cracks

During the summer months, some householders become concerned about creaks and the appearance of cracks in wooden floors. These annoying features

are more apparent at that time of year because loss of moisture during hot weather causes some shrinkage of the timber.

Solution

Creaking disappears when more humid conditions return at the end of summer, while gaps in flooring close up, to a large extent, in winter. Creaking may need re-nailing of certain boards.

The four pictures shown below depict different varieties of timber and timber usage. All the pictures are reproduced from the 'Living with Timber Floors' brochure, courtesy of the Timber Promotion Council.



Windows

Cold panes send a current of cool air moving through a room, despite the windows being weather stripped. This may be alleviated somewhat if you install heavy curtains and keep them closed during periods of cold weather, but a few problems may still occur.

Problem 1 – Sticking: Windows in Timber Frames

Timber frame windows may tend to stick.

Solution

To fix this problem rub the end of a candle on the window track to smooth the surface with hard wax.

Problem 2 – Appearance of Unevenness in Timber Frame

This may be caused by a faulty spring-loaded sash balance.

Solution

Check that the spring-loaded sash balance is correctly adjusted. It may need to be readjusted or replaced.

Problem 3 – Mechanism in Aluminium Windows

Damaged or faulty mechanism may become apparent in this type of window.

Solution

If this type of window is forced open, chances are the opening mechanism will sustain some damage. Silly as it may sound, check that the windows are unlocked before attempting to open them. Add a drop of oil or light grease to ensure that the mechanism operates smoothly.



Picture courtesy of Englehart Homes.

Problem 4 – Maintenance of Aluminium Window Frames

Although they require a minimum of maintenance, aluminium window frames should be cleaned whenever the windows are cleaned to ensure correct functioning. Note that specific instructions will have to be issued to your window cleaner, as this is not done in the normal course of cleaning. Accumulated grime should be washed off clear anodised surfaces, while natural finish aluminium (which will weather to a silver grey), may be cleaned after long neglect by using stainless steel wool. Steel wool may also be used to remove any stains on natural finish aluminium, but all cleaning operations should be followed by drying off and polishing.

Note: Under no circumstances should steel wool be used on clear anodised surfaces.

Problem 5 – Gaps in Window Sills

When new home owners notice a gap between the window and the bricks forming the sill, this causes some consternation.

Solution

Don't worry – this gap is to allow for a slight settlement that may occur in the timber frame of your home. Weather is prevented from entering by several methods, an aluminium window will have a plastic weather strip; in the case of a timber window, this may be filled with a waterproof mastic, or it may be flashed behind the brickwork.

Interior Walls

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Regardless of whether your interior walls are plaster or gypsum wallboard, they should last without undue maintenance for the life of the building. However, to prevent undue concern, we have tackled a couple of possible problem areas, but would remind you first to always use special fasteners for picture hanging or hanging lightweight fixtures to fibrous plaster and plaster board interiors (available from hardware and building supply stores).

Problem 1 - Minor Cracks in Walls

Minor cracks may appear in interior walls but these are beyond the control of your builder. Some of the causes are heavy street traffic, shrinkage in framing timbers, expansion and contraction of soil and, as is the case with concrete, the expansion and contraction of the material itself. Although they may be annoying, these cracks do not impair the structural soundness of your home.

Solution

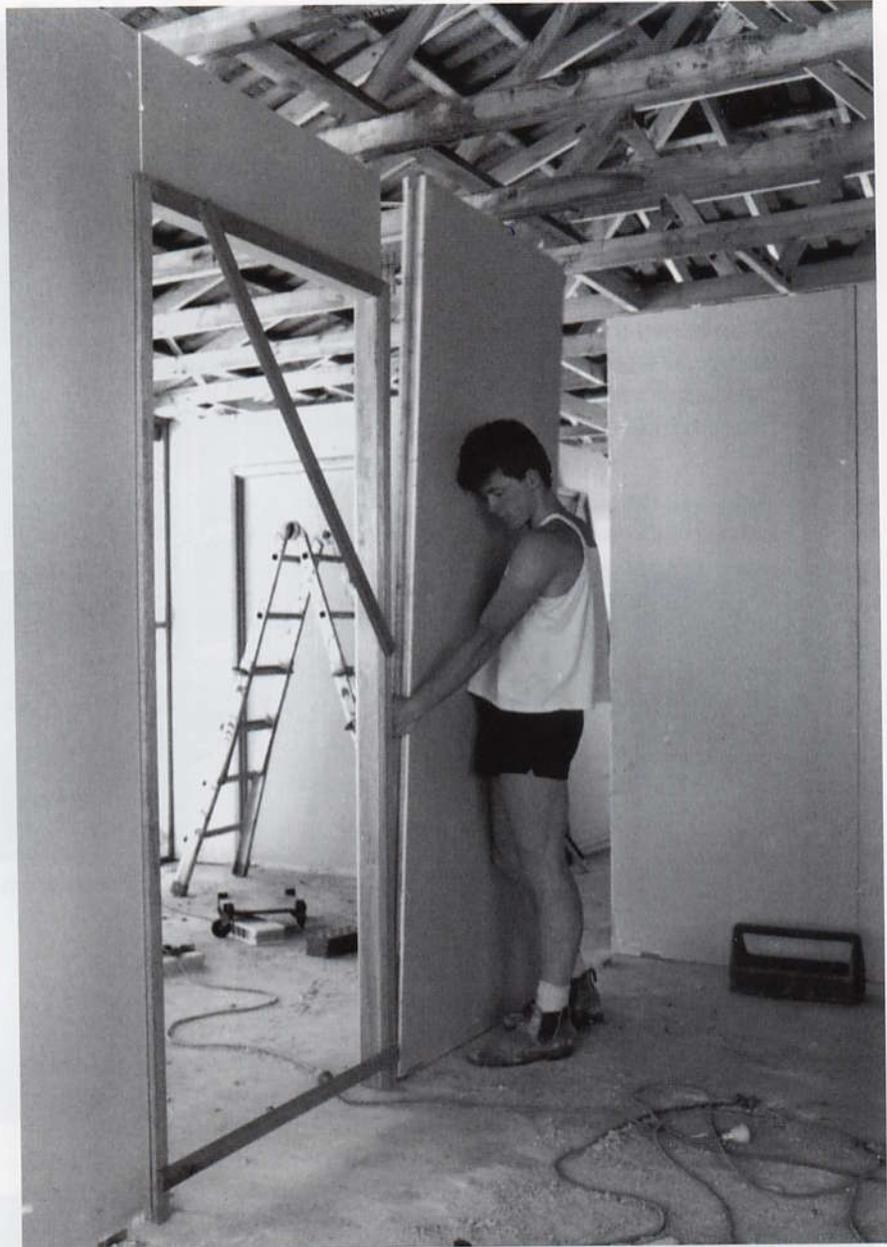
Do not attempt repair of these cracks for the first two years, as shrinkage is likely to continue for this period. At the expiration of two years, re-decoration will probably be necessary anyway and you can kill two birds with one stone. Fill the cracks with spackling compound (available from any paint store), smooth out with fine sandpaper and then re-decorate the entire surface.

Problem 2 - Scuffing or Indentation

Unusual abrasions may result in scuffs or indents on the surface of plaster or gypsum walls.

Solution

Fill indentation with two or



three applications of joint cement used for drywall taping, then paint or decorate as usual.

Problem 3 - Appearance of Uneven Walls

Always remember that no building surface is perfectly flat. The aim in building is to produce the appearances of flatness and, with plaster surfaces, this appearance of flatness can always be destroyed

by glancing light.

Solution

Avoid using glancing lights from isolated sources. They are best placed well below the level of the ceiling, or above it in suitably recessed fittings.

High gloss paint will also give an appearance of unevenness when the surface can be seen from a wide angle. For this reason, it should not be used on ceilings and long walls.

Roofs

Problem 1 - Sheet Roofing

Any scratching of paint can lead to corrosion under an apparently well painted area of sheet roofing, even where a bonded paint surface is applied at the factory. The sea air and heavy industrial atmospheres are a threat, as well as people walking on the roof which may result in a buckled roof and consequently in the loss of waterproofing.

Solution

Maintenance of sheet roofing paintwork is the same as for any other exposed painted surfaces. The replacement of an entire sheet may be necessary once damage has occurred to a small part of one sheet.

To avoid damage by the sea air, choose aluminium roofing but make sure that it is washed regularly to clear any deposits which may cause corrosion.

In the case of buckling, the entire sheet should be replaced to avoid loss of waterproofing.

Problem 2 - Tiled Roofing

Although tiles are more durable than sheet roofing, they have a tendency to be brittle and are susceptible to cracking when walked upon (when fixing a TV antenna for example).

Solution

Tile fixing requires a lot more skill than replacing sheet roofing and we would recommend that an expert be employed to carry out such repairs.

Check the guarantee given to you by your roofing supplier.

Should it be absolutely essential that you get onto the roof, be careful to stand on that part of the tile which overlaps the tile below. Place your feet at a



slight angle to the tile so that your weight is more evenly distributed. **NEVER** stand on the centre of a tile and always wear soft soled rubber shoes and **NEVER** attempt to walk on a steep pitch tiled roof when the tiles are wet, (even in dry conditions, a roof with a steep slope is dangerous and we would not recommend walking on such a roof).

To avoid possible water damage, please insist on replacement of tiles broken by maintenance people such as plumbers or television antennae installers.

Problem 3 - Roof Drainage

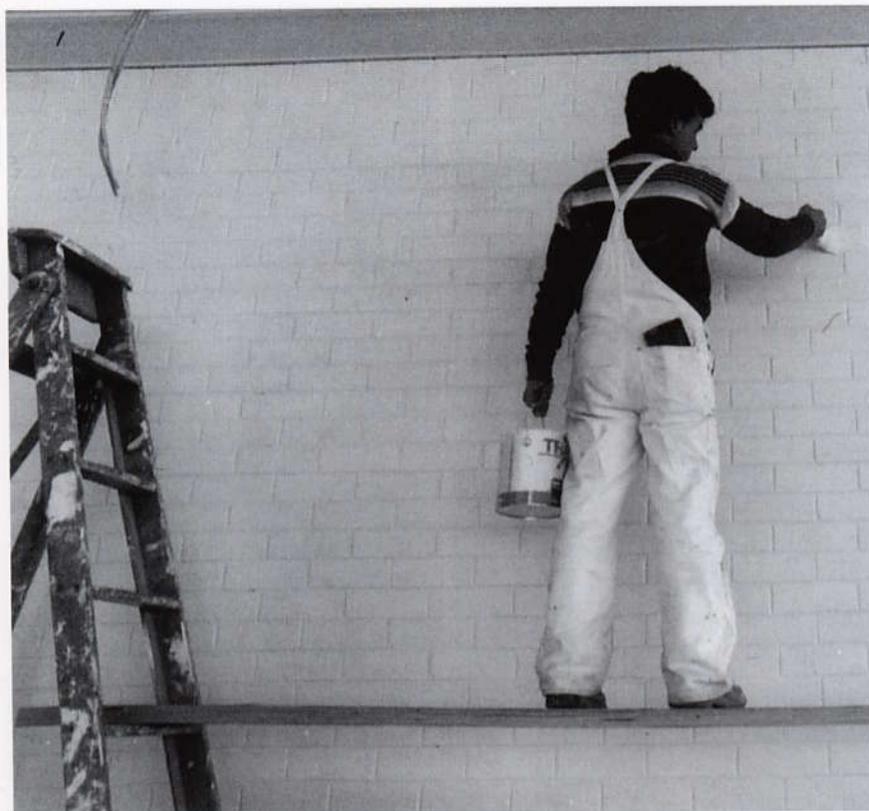
Flooding may occur if drainage is blocked or inadequate.

Solution

Firstly, check gutters and downpipes to ensure they are clear and unobstructed in a regular maintenance program. It would be wise to use plastic mesh to prevent debris collecting in gutters. If they are clear, the problem may be inadequate gutters and downpipes for the size of your home or for the rainfall in the area in which you reside.

Paintwork

10



Your Master Builder has decorated your home with the best paint products available for each type of service. All internal surfaces are washable to a greater or lesser degree but special care should be exercised with flat paints.

Problem 1 – Mould on Internal Paintwork

Sometimes difficult to recognise with the naked eye, mould (or mildew) is quite common. Rapid growth of mould is promoted by high humidity but, with humidities below 70%, they are relatively inactive. Mould may sometimes have the appearance of dirt or dust and normal cleaning practices would be sufficient to ensure complete elimination.

Solution

Using rubber gloves, mix one part bleach – this should be a household bleach with a sodium

hypochlorite base (usually marked on the label) – with three parts water in a plastic bucket or bowl. Wipe mixture over the area to be cleaned and leave for about 20 minutes.

Sponge off with clean water. This process may result in the need for the entire room to be washed, as the bleach will cause a variance in the paintwork.

Problem 2 – Pitted and Peeling External Paintwork

The amount of dust and grime on external paintwork, under eaves and on spouting is quite remarkable, and will result in pitted and peeling paintwork which will eventually flake off.

Solution

Hose down the paintwork at least twice a year. This is not a difficult chore and certainly worth the effort, as your home will retain its original beauty for many years without the need for costly and tedious re-painting.

Avoid the use of dark colours on external paintwork as heat absorption is increased and this may cause problems with buckling.

*Below: Picture courtesy of
Englehart Homes.*



Termites/Borers

11

There are 200 termite species in Australia. (You probably know them as white ants). Of these, only about a dozen are likely to cause damage.

Problem

Although the most threatening termite prefers the climate in the tropical north of Australia, it is wise to take some precautionary measures to control possible attack from any of the termite family. Despite its preference for a timber diet, this termite, *Mastoterme Darwiniensis* (or *Masto*) has such a huge appetite that it can devour a tree-trunk or a four poster bed in one night! Plastic cables, cow-dung pads, paper wool, corn, bagged salt, ivory, bitumen, rubber, ebonite, lead and even billiard balls have been attacked by this 15mm monster.



Solution

The only thing the *Masto* cannot eat through (and if they can't, no other termite can!) is an ant cap – which is a protective piece of metal. However, this will not deter an attack by *Masto* or any other termite. It will prevent these pests from eating their way unseen into your floor, wall and roof systems and, since they cannot eat their way through the ant cap, the termites will be forced out into the open where they are more easily detected.

It is in the interest of every Australian that regular annual inspections are carried out to detect the presence of this most destructive timber pest.

- DON'T disturb the colony, earthen runways or leads.
- DON'T remove any attacked woodwork.

- DON'T use chemical indiscriminately in an attempt at control.
- DO take steps to eliminate damp, badly ventilated sub-floors, accumulated wood debris, old trees and stumps, etc. – these are ideal conditions for termite colonisation.
- DO seek confirmation and advice from the Division of Building, Construction and Engineering, CSIRO.

Termites can be satisfactorily exterminated.

There are two major groups of borers – those which attack green timber and those which attack dry wood. Pinhole Borers, Longicorn and Jewel Beetles are of no concern as they attack green timber, which is not used in house building.

The Lyctus (powder post) borer and the Auger Beetle are of no concern either, even though they do attack hardwood. Victorian hardwoods contain only a small quantity of sapwood, which is the food of these borers and once they have eaten the supply of sapwood they must leave or die, leaving sound, basically undamaged timbers.

Problem 2 Anobiid Borers

Evidence of the presence of the Anobiid Borer is shown by the appearance of numerous round holes, 2-3mm diameter, with abundant, loose and gritty frass (borer dust), which feels like fine table salt. These borers are only found in timber several years old, and their attack spreads slowly. Treat-



ment is absolutely necessary.

Solution

Treat by injection or liberal flood spraying. The only other option is to replace the infested wood.

If in doubt – contact the preservation section, Division of Building, Construction and Engineering, CSIRO, or the Timber Promotion Council, for advice on the subject.

Grantigard:

A New Weapon in the War Against Termites

Grantigard is a specially graded and shaped fine granite aggregate. It is an entirely natural stone product which is non-toxic and chemically inert. It consists of granite particles which are too hard for the termites to chew and too big and heavy for them to move with their mandibles. When Grantigard is compacted on a building pad, the crevices between the particles are too narrow for the termites to crawl between. So they can't get to the timber elements of your home!

Grantigard is a one-off treatment which is easy to install. When correctly installed, it provides termite protection for the life of the new building. Grantigard is easy to maintain, requiring only regular inspections of foundations to check

that termites are not building tunnels to by-pass the barrier. Grantigard has been tested extensively by the CSIRO and is now accredited for

use in Australia, provided it is applied in the manner prescribed by the manufacturer.

Further information is available from Grantigard Pty Ltd on (03) 417 5455.

Kitchen and Bathroom

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There are three components of kitchens and bathrooms which require attention from time to time – plumbing fixtures, enamel, and laminated surfaces. With due care and attention, the life span of all three may be extended. Attention should also be given to cleaning shower bases and checking tile grout discoloration.

Problem 1 – Stains on Plumbing Fixtures

Most stains are caused by rust or water minerals, dirt or grease.

Solution

Regardless of whether or not the surface is acid resisting, slice up half a bar of naphtha-based soap in 1.1 litres of hot water. Add two tablespoons of paint thinners or dry-cleaning fluid. Using gloves, apply the solution to the fixture with a stiff bristled brush to remove most simple stains.

Rust stains on acid resistant surfaces may be removed with a solution of one part muriatic acid to ten parts water. Again using gloves, apply solution with a cloth and wash off promptly. Do not allow solution to come into contact with chrome plated fittings as this will pit the chrome.

Problem 2 – Paint, Rust or Acid Stains on Plumbing Fixtures

These are more complicated to remove and must be handled differently to avoid damaging the fixture's surface.

Solution

Hardened paint stains may be removed with a razor blade, taking care to keep the blade slanted against the fixture in order to



Photograph courtesy Englehart Homes.

avoid gouging the surface. Once the worst of the paint has been removed, use petrol, dry cleaning fluid or any ordinary household cleaner to remove the remainder.

Problem 3 – Food or Fruit Stains on Plumbing Fixtures

No matter how careful you are, there will always be some food or fruit staining to your plumbing fixtures.

Solution

Make up a paste of peroxide and equal parts of cream of tartar and a household cleaner. Apply and allow to stand for 10 to 15 minutes before washing off.

Problem 4 – Enamel

Carelessness can cause scratches and stains, and shiny new fixtures soon become dulled through improper care or excessive use of strong abrasive cleaners.

Solution

Obviously, the first thing to do is to make sure that a bath is used for bathing in – don't step in the bath with shoes on! Shoe soles carry hundreds of particles which can scratch the enamel. Common sense should also tell

you not to use the bath, or any of your plumbing fixtures, as storing units for paint tins, tools, etc., or as receptacles for photographic or developing materials. The first will cause scratching and chipping and the second will leave permanent stains.

All household cleaners are mildly abrasive, but if used in moderation and with plenty of water, most of them are not harmful.

Problem 5 – Laminates

These products are normally used on bench tops, vanity bars, etc. and although quite tough and durable, a little care and attention will extend the life of these units both in your kitchen and bathroom.

Solution

Be careful not to place hot pans and pots directly from the stove on to your laminated bench top.

Although the heat resistance of this product is high, it is not designed to be used as an ironing board.

Cutting or chopping should be done on a bread board or similar, not on your bench top.

Abrasives will destroy the highly polished finish of your bench top; use a good wax polish to clean and restore the surface.

Septic Tanks and Grease Traps

To avoid problems, septic tanks require cleaning every 2-3 years. (Check your "Yellow Pages" for companies who are able to carry out this work.) Grease traps need more frequent attention and should be cleaned every two or three weeks.

Problem 1 - Overflowing Septic Tank

If due care and attention have not been provided, your septic tank will overflow.

Solution

Precaution is the most successful treatment.

- DON'T flush hair, grease substances, lint, or other rubbish down the toilet pan. These will block the sewer drains.

- DO choose disinfectants and toilet papers carefully, making sure to select only those types designed for septic sewerage systems.
- DO empty a bucket of warm water down your septic pan each week or two.
- DO pump the handle of hand-operated pumps which are attached to the side of the house if the effluent line is above the septic tank. This should be done several times a day, depending on the number of times the toilet is flushed. Should your pump be electric, this will be done automatically.

Septic tank problems should be referred to the Local Health Inspector.

Problem 2 -

Blocked Grease Traps

As with septic tanks, grease traps will also pose problems without proper care.

Solution

If you are careful and do not pour tea leaves, fat, etc. down sinks, it may only be necessary to attend to your grease trap every six months. However, it should never be entirely neglected as refuse will inevitably enter in the course of normal use.

Grease traps must be cleaned every two or three weeks by removing the cover and scooping out any extraneous matter, followed by cleaning with a soap powder or a solvent recommended by your hardware dealer. (Detergents will corrode most grease traps).

Condensation

When you consider the many litres of water in the materials such as concrete, plaster, wall paper paste, tilework and even some types of paint, used during construction of your home, it is hardly surprising that condensation is most apparent in new homes.

Problem - Excessive Moisture Due to Condensation

As a result of the amount of water in building materials, droplets of moisture will appear and, although quite normal, this often causes new home owners some concern.

Solution

1. Aid the drying out process by ensuring adequate ventilation when you move into your new home. DO NOT use excessive

heating in winter in an attempt to speed up this process, as this will only result in uneven drying which will exaggerate normal shrinkage.

2. Open windows in laundry areas while washing and drying clothes.
3. Install an exhaust fan in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry areas or, failing this, open windows whilst cooking, showering or washing.
4. Maintain proper surface drainage around your home to prevent moisture vapour rising inside the home.
5. Ensure that equipment such as space heaters and clothes dryers are properly vented.

Thermal Insulation

14

Thermal insulation in the walls and roof of your new home is a hidden asset which will require no maintenance or upkeep. The insulation will raise the level of comfort within your home and reduce the energy dollars you spend on heating and cooling.

It is a mandatory requirement of building regulations in Victoria.

Problem -

Subsequent Installation

Generally, it is easy to install insulation at any time in the ceiling but adding it to the walls is more difficult and expensive.

Solution

There are some options for you to consider however, and you should seek the advice of your Master Builder.

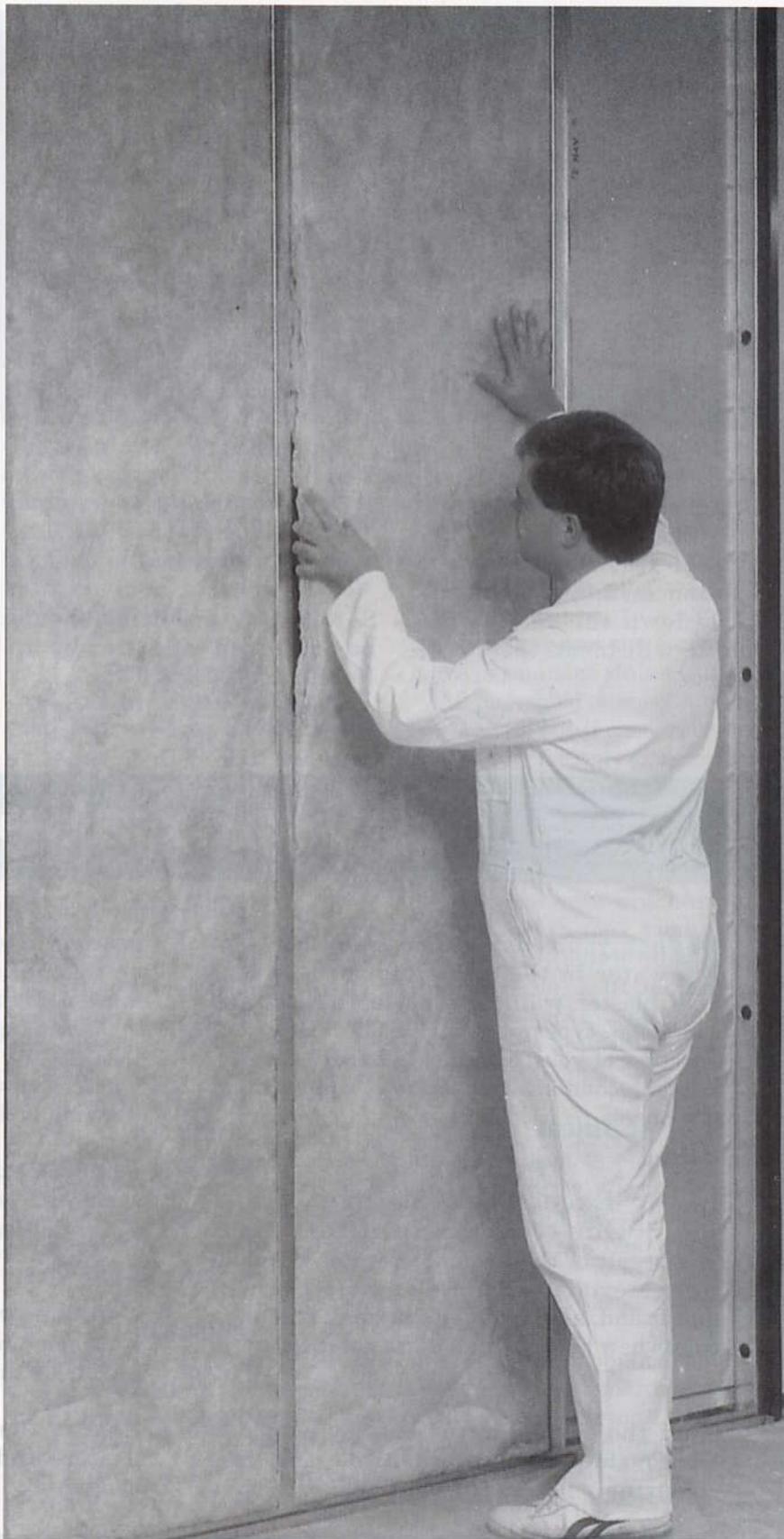
To get the full benefit of your insulation, draw blinds or curtains in winter and summer and, if you have external blinds, these should be drawn during the summer months.

Keep doors and windows closed both during summer and winter.

Energy Efficiency

Care should be taken to ensure that the natural energy efficient qualities of new houses, are used to best advantage. Such things as closing curtains in summer day time to reduce heat build-up internally. Closing curtains at night to ensure warm air does not contact cold glass. Draught exclusion and weather stripping devices around external doors, are also good measures to improve energy efficiency. A visit to the Energy Information Centre at 139 Flinders Street, Melbourne would also be worthwhile.

Picture courtesy of ACI Insulation.



Home Security

15

It is estimated that one in five homes will be broken into over the next five years.

Possessions such as VCRs and televisions, if stolen, can usually be replaced under household contents insurance. However, there is no compensation for the violation of your privacy or the loss of personal items with significant sentimental value.

You cannot in most cases make your home totally burglar proof, however, by taking a few basic precautions would-be thieves can be strongly deterred from violating your home.

Doors

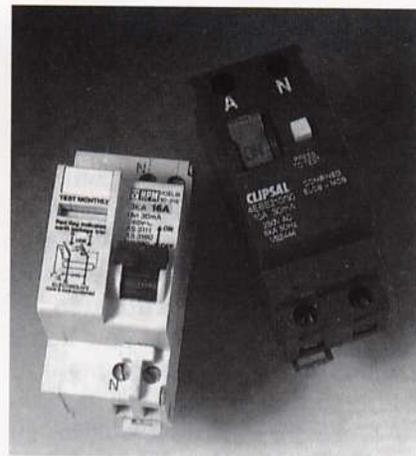
Rear doors and patio doors (partic-

ularly sliding type) are very popular with thieves for gaining access. Secure locks are necessary.

Front doors are most popular amongst thieves for carrying out your possessions, therefore inside security is as important as outside security. A good quality deadlatch type lock is recommended.

Windows

Windows are also very popular for gaining access to your house. Suitable windowlocks should be fitted to ALL windows. Don't forget small windows such as those in toilets or ensuites, as children are often used to gain access through these so that they can



then open doors for thieves.

Manhole Covers

Some thieves gain access to your house through the roof. Manhole covers should be latched internally to prevent access.

Gates

Thieves always look for easy access. Even a locked side gate will act as a deterrent.

Sheds

Sheds often contain valuable tools, including tools which can be used to obtain access to your house. Ensure that adequate locks are fitted.

Alarm Systems

The strongest deterrent to would-be thieves is a properly installed alarm system. When activated, an alarm system will normally sound a very loud siren. The noise will scare off thieves and also alert neighbours who can contact the police on your behalf.

An alarm system can be used to monitor doors, windows and internal areas, particularly those areas where you may have valuables. The range of alarms vary from localised units sounding a siren through to units which can be monitored 24 hours a day by the larger security companies.



Home Safety

16

In employing the safest designs known in home construction, your Master Builder has done all he can to minimise home dangers. There are many accidents around the home which could be avoided with a little preventative education, proper observance of safeguards, and caution in maintenance and use of equipment by you, the new home owner.

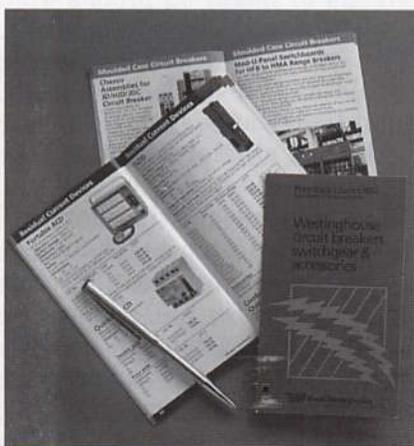
Problem 1 - Falls by the Elderly and Young Children

Old people and young children are the two age groups most often the victims of home accidents, according to National Safety Council figures. Many of these falls could be avoided.

Solution

Where possible, confine living areas to one level. Many fatal falls occur in sleeping areas, and cluttered steps and stairways cause their share of accidents.

Maintain proper lighting and keep traffic areas free of obstructions such as children's toys or furniture. Toys should be stored safely after use - whether you do



this yourself or teach your child to do so.

Make sure floor finishes are skid-resistant.



Problem 2 - Electrical Accidents

Sufficient electrical outlets have been provided by your Master Builder. However, many accidents are caused through improper use of these outlets. It is now mandatory to have safety switches and earth leakage circuit breakers on all power circuits.

Solution

Do not overload electrical outlets and do not stretch cords across work areas or the floor. NEVER switch on electricity while in, or working with water; you may electrocute yourself.

Problem 3 - Poison Accidents

Poison accidents take a heavy toll on children's lives.

Solution

ALWAYS place medicines, drugs and household cleaning materials well out of reach of little hands or in locked cabinets.

Problem 4 - Leaking Gas

Gas appliances may develop a leak, which could result in unpleasant and dangerous fumes.

Solution

Check gas appliances frequently. Regular maintenance of all gas appliances makes for safer and more economical use of your cooker, hot water service, space heater, etc. Your gas supplier will be pleased to give you full information on this service. As an added precaution, store matches well out of reach of children.

Planning Your Garden

When organising the landscaping of your garden it is imperative that you plan ahead. There are a few possible problems which you should be aware of. Make sure there is no build-up of garden beds adjacent to walls. This can lead to rising damp and associated problems.

Problem 1 - Trees and Shrubs

Tree roots can cause damage to underground drains and sewer lines as well as the foundations of your home. Foliage not only causes blockage in drains, it also constitutes a hazard in bushfire

areas, as well as overshadowing a solar heating system.

Solution

Bear in mind the mature size of the tree or shrub before deciding on the location. Trees should not overhang the roof and should not touch the walls. Too many trees and shrubs in close proximity to the house will cause rapid build up of leaves in roof guttering, which will necessitate more frequent inspections and cleaning. Your local nursery will provide you with assistance.

Check with your Master Builder on the location of under-

ground drains and sewer lines before planting shrubs and trees.

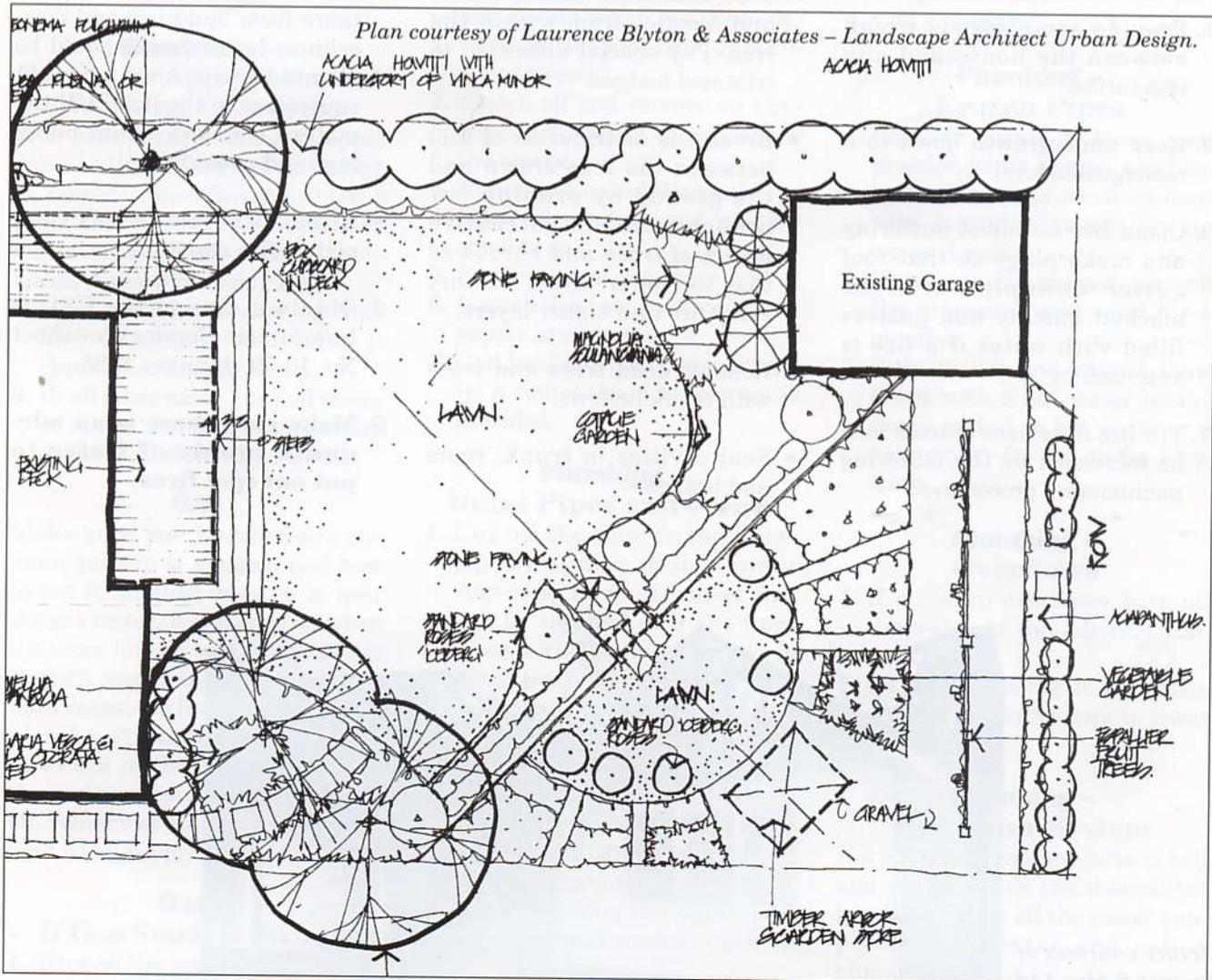
Problem 2 - Drainage

A build up of water may occur and cause water to flow to underfloor spaces if drainage is inadequate.

Solution

To prevent this build up, ensure that the area immediately adjacent to the house is well drained.

Another precaution is to ensure that you grade the soil away from the outer walls of your home.



Bushfires

18

If you live in a bushfire-prone area, there are a number of measures you can take to protect your home and perhaps save it from destruction in a bushfire.

1. Protect all external openings – windows, doors, vents, chimneys – with metal flywire screens or shutters to prevent glass breakage which would allow embers to enter the house.
2. Seal all exterior gaps for the same reason – eaves, around windows and doors, etc.
3. Protect the sub-floor area.
4. Provide some sort of break between the house and any vegetation.
5. Keep undergrowth down to a manageable level.
6. Clean leaves out of guttering and make plugs so that roof gutter downpipes can be blocked quickly and gutters filled with water if a fire is approaching.
7. The fire resistance of trees may be increased by the following maintenance procedures:
 - Water trees during summer to maintain leaf moisture content. The wetter a leaf is, the less likely it will burn.
 - Remove accumulated debris on the ground, especially that on north and west aspects and downslope from trees. Dig litter or mulch into the soil to prevent surface material from burning. Remove mulch about the tree trunk to avoid damage to the living conductive tissue beneath the bark, should the mulch catch fire.
 - Remove accumulated debris such as flaky and loose bark, dead branches, limbs, leaves and needles from within the tree. Pay special attention to trimmed hedges.
 - Break the distribution of fuel between the tree crown and the ground by pruning low branches. Avoid successive layers of trees and shrubs so that the lower layers will not carry fire into higher layers.
 - Remove dead trees and trees with trunk hollows.
 - Seal cavities in trunk, roots and branches.
- Plant succulent ground cover, which is fire resistant, under and around trees. Alternatively, maintain green lawns, cultivated soil or gravel areas beneath trees.
- Where practicable, especially on north and west aspects, replace trees of low fire resistance with trees of high resistance.
- Avoid large dense clumps of trees and shrubs. Keep dense clumps small and discrete and of predominantly fire resistant plants.
- Ensure trees are a safe distance from buildings and powerlines. Large trees should be planted a distance at least equivalent to the height of the mature tree away from buildings and powerlines.
- Remember – no tree is completely fire resistant.

8. Obtain a copy of the CSIRO Information Service Newsheet No. 10-89, January 1985.

9. **Make sure there is an adequate supply of water to put out spot fires.**



Picture courtesy of
Bryant & May Ltd

Emergency Procedures – Electricity, Gas, Plumbing

19

This section contains step by step instructions to follow in the case of an emergency relating to electricity, gas and water.

Electricity – Blown Fuses – Tripped Circuit Breakers

1. Turn the power off at the main fuse box. Never try to trace an electrical fault with the power switched on.
2. If trouble is caused by faulty equipment, disconnect it from the supply and fit new fuse of correct value. Have appliance checked and repaired.
3. If fault cannot be located switch off at mains and call an electrician to isolate and repair the fault. Restore supply.

Electricity – Wiring or Appliances Not Working Correctly

It is possible for wiring or appliances to have a short circuit which is, however, insufficient to blow a fuse. This can result in overheating or shocks from wiring, appliances, water pipes and taps.

1. If an appliance is causing trouble, unplug it and have it checked and repaired.
2. In all other cases, turn off power at mains and call an electrician or the local electricity board.

Gas

Make sure you know where the main gas tap is situated and how to use it. In most cases, it is near the gas meter. It is turned off when the score line on top of the valve is at right angles to the gas pipe. In most cases, the lever or handle will also be at right angles to the pipework in the 'off' position. If the mains supply has to be turned off, remember to re-light gas pilot light when supply is restored.

Gas – If Gas Smell is Strong

1. Turn off the main gas tap.

2. Call the local gas board immediately, day or night.
3. Do not attempt to trace the escape with a naked flame.
4. Extinguish any naked flames in the area and switch off electric fires.
5. Do not enter a room where the smell of gas is very strong; the build up of gas may have reached an overpowering stage.
6. Carry anyone overcome by gas fumes into the open air and send for ambulance. Give "kiss of life".

Gas –

If a Gas Smell is Slight

Often, cause of escape will be obvious – for instance, a pilot light or cooker burner which has gone out.

1. Turn off the pilot light or burner concerned.
2. Switch off and remove an electric fire if used in same room as the escape.
3. Extinguish naked flames.
4. Open all windows and wait for smell to go
5. Re-light pilots or burners.
6. If smell does not go, turn off gas supply at main tap.
7. Call local gas board immediately; a round-the-clock service is provided.

Plumbing –

Burst Pipes and Joints

1. Cut off the flow to the burst pipe by turning off the nearest stop-cock. In most houses this will be situated near the front fence with the meter, while in home units it is usually in a cupboard under the kitchen sink. Sometimes the stop-cock may not have a handle fitted to it – if yours is like this, keep a handle in a convenient spot. Use pliers in an emergency.
2. Get somebody to wrap bags or sacking around the burst, and place a bowl underneath to catch any drips.

3. Turn off the water inlet and power to the hot water system.
4. Send for a plumber.

Plumbing – Leaks

1. Place a bowl under the leak and try to trace its source if this is not immediately obvious.
2. Cut off the flow to the leak by turning off the stop-cock. See item 1 under "Plumbing – Burst Pipes and Joints" for location.
3. Turn off the water inlet and power to the hot water system. If a hot water system leaks – whether storage or instant – turn off the control tap near the heater. Also turn the power off.
4. Call a plumber.

Plumbing – Frozen Pipes

1. Feel for bursts or loose compression joints around any likely trouble spots, such as near cold draughts or against an exposed wall.
2. If the pipe is damaged, turn off the stop-cock and send for a plumber.
3. If the pipe is undamaged, thaw it out with a hot water bottle, cloths soaked in hot water or a hair dryer. Do not use a blow lamp.

Plumbing – Overflows

1. If a cistern overflows, turn off the water at the adjacent control tap.
2. Fit a new washer to ball-valve or bend ball-valve arm to lower water level.

Plumbing – Hot Water System

If a hot water system starts to boil and rumble, then the thermostat has failed. Turn off the power supply to the heater and call a plumber.

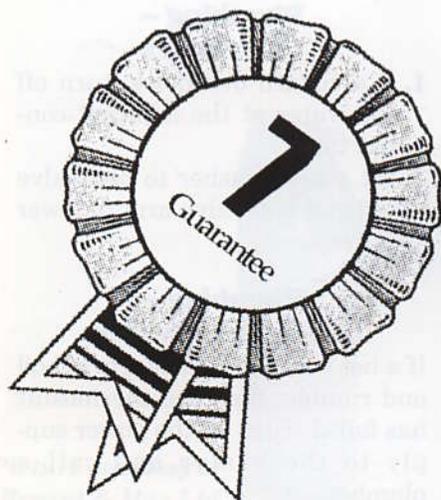
Your Guarantee

Like all good products, the house you have bought comes with a guarantee. Subject to certain conditions and requirements, your home is covered for seven years against defects in workmanship, which includes not only the house itself but also any outbuildings, retaining walls which were required by law, and drainage and sewerage works, which formed part of the original contract.

The guarantee, which is more fully defined in the House Contracts Guarantee Act 1987, is provided in three separate stages, each of which is subject to different requirements.

First Stage - Three Month Period Immediately Following Occupation

During this time, which is often referred to as the "defects liability period", your Master Builder will rectify all minor defects which appear and of which he is advised either orally or in writing. Minor blemishes or movements caused by the settling of natural materials are NOT regarded as being caused by bad workmanship and are therefore not defects.



Second Stage - Remaining Nine Months of the First Year

Your Master Builder will rectify defects where loss or damage is at least \$100.00 for each single defect during this period.

Third Stage - Remaining Period of Guarantee (refer to final paragraph)

Loss of damage during this stage must amount to at least \$500.00 for each single defect.

In relation to the second and third stages of the guarantee, you must notify either your Master Builder or the Housing Guarantee Fund Limited of the alleged defect within six months of becoming aware of it.

In most cases, your Master Builder will attend to any defects which appear without the need for the Fund to become involved but, should there be a failure to respond to your notice, the Fund should be advised in writing. An inspection by a representative of the Fund will follow and, subject to the inspector's report, a notice will be issued to your Master Builder requiring him to rectify any defects.

Your Master Builder will then carry out the rectification or, if the directive is disputed, appeal to the Appeals Committee. Similarly, should the Fund refuse to give a directive to your Master Builder, you may appeal against such refusal or failure.

The maximum liability of the Fund under any guarantee is \$40,000.00, which includes all defects that might occur during the guarantee period.

Should you sell the house before expiration of the guarantee period, the balance of the guarantee will pass to the next owner.

The starting date for the guarantee will depend on the nature of your purchase contract. Should you have entered into the contract with your Master Builder for the construction of your house, the guarantee period commences upon the earlier of either the signing of the contract or the issue of the building approval. The defects liability period commences upon practical completion being achieved. If, however, you have purchased a stock house - that is, one which was already constructed by the Master Builder when you purchased it - the guarantee commences from the date of issue of the building approval, whilst the defects liability period commences on the date on which you were entitled to take possession. Check the relevant provisions of your contract, (Uniform Housing Contract 1 or equivalent), for defects liability provisions, etc.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Police
-
- Fire
- Ambulance
-
- Doctor
-
- SEC.....
- Gas.....
- Local Council
-
-
- Others.....
-
-

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