

# Information Sheet

## How to spot a damp and cold home

***When you rent or buy a home it's important that you choose one that is as warm and dry as possible – this will help keep you healthy and save you money. Consider the following points and complete the score sheet overleaf, either by looking yourself or asking the agent/landlord, when viewing properties***

### **Orientation and aspect**

Sunlight is a free source of heat and light - use as much as you can. Ideally the main living areas will face north and not be shaded by trees, steep slopes or other buildings. Many Wellington houses are in gullies and may not receive much direct sunlight. If possible view the flat in the daylight or know which way is north.

### **Topography**

Houses located at the bottom of gullies – where streams and waterways would naturally flow – may have damp underfloor conditions. If the house has a suspended timber floor with exposed underfloor soil, a ground vapour barrier (GVB) is highly recommended. This will prevent cold, damp air being drawn into the house. If there is no GVB, at least ensure the underfloor area has 40cm of clear space to install one. Newer houses built on concrete slab foundations do not normally suffer this problem.

### **Insulation**

40% of heat in an un-insulated house is lost through the ceiling, 10% - 15% through the floor and 24% through the walls. Check for:

- Insulation in the ceiling, walls and under the floor. If it's a rental, check the tenancy agreement for a Statement of Insulation (legal requirement since July 2016) and the property itself (where possible)
- New laws for rentals require both ceiling and underfloor insulation to meet certain minimum standards by 2019. Sustainability Trust recommends shopping around for rentals that already meet the standards, or asking landlords to upgrade sooner
- The cost of insulation can be reduced by 50% for properties with a Community Services Card holder, so check if this is an option for your home.
- The Greater Wellington Regional Council rates scheme provides loans for homeowners of up to \$3,900 for insulation, repayable over a max. 9 year period at around \$23/month. It's easy to get so check if this is an option for your home

### **Curtains**

10-15% of heat is lost through windows. Check for or get curtains which are:

- Lined (not thermal backed, this makes no difference to heat retention). A simple layer of cotton lining makes a big difference to keeping heat inside
- Ideally touching the floor
- Carefully fitted to cover the full window frame with a close fit

### Heating

Without a reliable heat source your home is likely to be cold and damp. Check your main living space for energy efficient, fixed heating. Ideally you want a suitably sized:

- Energy Star rated heat pump, or efficient clean burning log burner, or pellet burner, or flued gas heater (one with all gases vented outside the property e.g. through a chimney)
- Avoid unflued gas heaters; they release harmful gases and water vapour into the room

### Draughts

A draughty house will be cold and expensive to heat. Check for gaps:

- around windows and doors, especially your front and back doors
- around pipes in the kitchen and bathroom
- if you can plug these gaps, make sure to replace stale air by ventilating your house.

### Ventilation

A well ventilated home is drier than a poorly ventilated one. It will be healthier for you and cheaper to heat. Check for:

- windows that open and close easily, and have workable security stays
- extractor fans in the kitchen and bathroom (preferably humidistat controlled)
- adequate natural ventilation under the house: vent holes or gaps in timber side boards, clear of any vegetation

### Leaks, Dampness and Mould

Damp in the home can lead to health problems and will cost more to heat. Leaks can be a source of damp. Check for:

- leaks in guttering, downpipes and other plumbing
- damp underfloor soil and poor drainage around the house. This is crucial. You may need a ground vapour barrier
- An outdoor clothesline with good access to sunlight – drying laundry insides adds to internal water vapour
- mould on walls, carpets, curtains, ceilings or in cupboards
- musty smells. Bear in mind that a flat freshly cleaned for viewing may not smell musty or have visible mould

# Damp and Cold Scorecard

Choose the score for each category that is the closest fit to the property you are looking at and add up the total for the house. It is unlikely that every circumstance is covered below so just pick the nearest one. This scorecard gives an indication of the property standards, but is not a detailed assessment.

	4	3	2	1	0	Score
<b>Orientation and aspect</b>	North or NW facing, no shade	North or NW facing, shade	East or West facing, no shade	East or West facing, shade	South facing	
<b>Insulation</b>	Ceiling, underfloor and walls and lined curtains	Ceiling and underfloor, lined curtains	Ceiling only, >120mm, thin curtains	Ceiling only, <120mm, no curtains	None, no curtains	
<b>Heating</b>	Very efficient, e.g. energy star heat pump, approved log/pellet burner or 4 star AGA rated flued gas heater	Efficient e.g. heat pump, log/pellet burner or flued gas heater	Less efficient e.g. electric portable heating	Very inefficient e.g. open fire or unflued gas heater.	None	
<b>Draughts</b>	No gaps around doors, windows or pipes	Gaps around pipes and internal doors only	Gaps around pipes and small gaps around windows	Gaps around pipes and large gaps around windows	Large gaps around pipes, windows and doors, especially front and back doors.	
<b>Ventilation</b>	Windows that open easily with security stays, kitchen and bathroom extractor fans vented to outside, ample subfloor ventilation or a ground vapour barrier (GVB).	Windows that open easily with security stays, extractor fans vented to outside, average subfloor ventilation. Dry underfloor soil.	Windows that open easily and have security stays, no extractor fans or fans vented to attic space, poor subfloor ventilation. No GVB.	Windows that open, no extractor fans, poor subfloor ventilation. No GVB. Damp underfloor soil.	Windows don't open, no extractor fans, poor subfloor ventilation. No GVB and wet underfloor soil, with mould.	
<b>Leaks, dampness and mould</b>	No evidence of damp, mould, leaks or poor drainage around the house.	No leaks, no damp soil under the house. Faint musty smell in cupboards only.	No leaks, no damp soil under the house, musty smells in some rooms	Minor leaks, mould and musty smells throughout house, damp underfloor soil.	Major leaks, mould and musty smells present, damp soil under the house and poor drainage	
<b>Bonus points</b>	Good 'thermal mass': brick or concrete surfaces, facing north.	No high-stud ceilings. Less than 2.5m high is preferable: it means less space to heat.	Double glazing in high use rooms: lounge, bedrooms.	Clean carpet with thick underlay. Dry underfloor soil.	N/A	
<b>Total score:</b>						

## How does the house score?

- 0 – 6** - move away from the property!
- 7 – 12** - avoid this house, it needs too much work to make it healthy
- 13 – 18** - pretty good, worth investigating further and agreeing an action plan to improve some issues
- 19 – 26** - a good bet for a warm, dry home
- 27 – 28** - probably the best home in Wellington!