

# 7 Things you **MUST** know before hiring a **Waterproofing Contractor**

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**M**ost homeowners know that early detection of problems around the home is important. The structural integrity of your home and the costs associated with maintaining it require that well thought out, carefully researched plans be undertaken to protect your home when problems develop. A deliberate approach can make the difference between fixing a problem once and for all, and facing significant financial losses associated with poorly done work. But certain kinds of problems, in particular issues related to water damage, can sometimes prove difficult to recognize and treat, making early detection critically important, and more of a challenge. Further, understanding the causes of water damage, along with its potentially devastating costs, are not always known to homeowners. In order to protect the lasting value that a home represents, a homeowner must know how to determine if water damage exists, and perhaps most important of all, how to evaluate a waterproofing contractor who can keep your home dry and safe. **Important information on how to recognize problems, keep your house dry and your family and investment safe, and finally, how to get help is described on the next pages.**

## **1. How to Recognize Signs of Water Damage in Your Home.**

Obvious signs of water damage are puddles on basement floors after a hard rain, damp spots on basement walls, peeling paint, rust on appliances or tools, and warped paneling in the case of a finished basement area. Less obvious, but not less troubling, are cracking or bowing of basement walls and the presence of a white chalky substance that can appear on walls. Careful and deliberate inspection of all basement area on a routine basis, especially after a hard rain, can catch problems before they get out of control. A strange odor, usually the result of mold, may be the only hint of a problem and may require the removal of paneling or carpeting to determine whether moisture or mold is present.

## **2. The problem with precipitation and pressure.**

One inch of rainfall on an acre of land equates to 27,000+ gallons of water. When the earth becomes saturated, the water travels through the ground in capillary like underground streams. This allows water to fill up around the foundation where the original excavation was performed. Pressure already exists on the foundation depending on the grade level around the basement. A 30-foot wall that is 8 feet in grade already has 15,000+ pounds of pressure on it. When the water level rises, this pressure increases exponentially. Exposure to this on a constant basis can weaken a foundation.

## **3. The Costs of a Damp or Wet Basement.**

A wet or damp basement can actually erode the structural integrity of your home. Not surprisingly, a damp or wet basement can diminish the value of your home by 15% and some estimates run as high as 25%. Left unchecked, a wet or damp basement can, in fact, become a health hazard to you and your family should mold develop. In finished basements, treasured family possessions are vulnerable to the corrosive effects of dampness and moisture. Tools will rust, wood flooring can warp, and carpeting can be destroyed due to mold and mildew. The presence of moisture is also known to attract termites and other insects. Your floor beams and furnace can also be damaged by excessive moisture. Water or moisture in proximity to electrical panels is extremely hazardous.

## **4. Why You Should Waterproof Your Basement.**

Your home is the single largest investment you will likely ever make. A wet basement undermines that investment in many ways. Waterproofing your basement protects your family's safety and health, your home's foundation, and your possessions. A dry basement can be utilized for hobbies and additional living space and most important, a dry basement is hostile to mold, mildew and termites. The cost associated with creating additional living space in a dry basement is significantly less than building an addition on your house. For these reasons it makes good economic sense to waterproof your basement.

## **5. Understanding the Dangers of Mold in Your Home.**

Mold is not a plant or an animal, but a fungus. Fungi are everywhere and are part of our everyday lives but the problem is that exposure to mold has the potential to create real health risks. Mold needs very little to gain a foothold in your home-a little moisture, a little warmth and a little food is all it takes. Exacerbating the problem is that mold often develops in areas that are difficult to see, such as beneath carpeting and tiles, or behind walls, and can therefore become a major problem before being detected. In many cases, the presence of mold is detected by smell. A strong, musty odor is usually a sign that you have mold. Health problems associated with mold can be significant. Allergic reactions such as hay fever like symptoms, skin rash, runny nose, itchy eyes, coughing and

sneezing, are cited most often. Even more serious effects of exposure to mold have been alleged, and studies are being conducted to determine what effects exposure to mold can bring. A dry, waterproof basement is hostile to mold. Mold remediation is a good idea, but it does not make sense until the basement is dry.

**6. The progressive and aggressive nature of water problems.**

Water problems are both progressive and aggressive. Only two things can happen with a basement water problem. They can get fixed or they WILL get worse! Early detection is the key! The content of the soil up and down the East coast causes much more rapid deterioration of foundation materials.

**7. How to Choose a Waterproofing Contractor.**

Waterproofing a home requires significant skill, so it's important to choose a licensed, bonded and where applicable, certified contractor. Check with friends or colleagues to see if they have had similar work done. They may be able to provide names and shed some light on the process. Work with a company that has a tie in your community and that will provide you with references with which you can follow up. Reputable contractors only require a third to a half deposit. Review any contract carefully before you sign. By asking yourself some tough questions before you settle on a contractor, you can avoid much bigger problems later. Was a thorough inspection of my home conducted? Was the contractor professional and courteous? Was I given a detailed explanation of the problem and proposed solutions? Did I receive a written estimate in a timely fashion? Did I receive references? Does the contractor have the required licenses, bonding and insurance? Visit the contractors' facility; reputable firms will be delighted to show you their offices, equipment and personnel. All contracts should include detailed information about the contractor's location, contract information, estimate starting and completion dates, that any required permits will be secured, that no changes will be made without homeowner approval, along with costs and payment arrangements. A contractor is also required to provide you with a "Notice of Right to Cancel" form. This allows you to cancel a contract within three business days. Be very wary of contractors who ask you to waive this right. Following these steps will help you to retain a competent, courteous professional.

**Conclusion**

A proactive approach to maintaining your home's integrity and value pays immediate and long-term dividends. Not only is your home an important asset, it's where you and your family are creating memories, and living your lives together. Water damage is especially costly, and as noted above, can negatively impact your family's health. By following these guidelines, you can prevent and correct minor problems, and if more significant expertise is needed to protect your home, you now have the know-how needed to hire the right contractor to waterproof your home.

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