Having inspected about 800 homes in the last four years, I have seen a lot of problems with many homes. Most of these problems are minor; however, there are some problems that are quite serious. One of the more serious problems that I see over and over again is water penetration into the home. What makes this problem so serious is that if it is left uncorrected, the water can cause serious damage to the home.

Water can come from rain water or it can originate from leaks in the plumbing system. Rain water can penetrate a home through the roof, though damaged siding, through unsealed windows or doors, or by soaking into siding or other wood that has been installed in direct contact with soil or concrete. Plumbing leaks can cause damage in walls, floors, carpeting and under the home.

Once wood and other building products get wet, mold and mildew begin to grow and rot starts. I have inspected homes that have significant rot on the structure (subfloors and joists) under the home, on the siding or other wood trim on the exterior of the home, or on the wood decking underneath the roof. In some of these cases significant structural damage had already occurred - requiring hundreds or thousands of dollars to repair. These defects are normally easily preventable; with just some regular inspection (by the home owner) and maintenance, the large majority of these problems and expenses can be avoided.

What can the home owner do to prevent water damage to the home? That's easy – keep water outside the building "envelop." The building envelop consists of the roof, the exterior siding, the exterior doors and windows, and the subfloors - if the home has a crawlspace. These are designed to keep the outside elements outside the home.

The first thing to do is to inspect your home. At lease once a year the homeowner should fully inspect the home by looking on the roof, in the attic, in the crawlspace, and around the exterior. On the roof look for damaged shingles or other problems that can lead to leaks. I would suggest going into the attic during or right after a heavy rain storm. This will allow you to look for any active water leaks as well as for rot on the roof decking. Walk around the exterior of the home and look for peeling or missing paint or otherwise bare wood. Look for wood that is in contact with the soil. Look for areas around doors and windows where water can get to bare wood and cause rot. Look for wood that has already started rotting. Next, inspect the crawlspace if your home has one. Before you enter the crawlspace, turn on all the water in the home so you can look for plumbing leaks. Look around in the crawlspace as much as possible looking for water that is coming from leaks or rain water running underneath the home. Look for rot on the sub flooring, floor joists, sill plates, and any other wood in the crawlspace.

The final step is to correct any problems that are found during the inspection. Repair any problems found with the roof. Scrape, caulk, and repaint any area on the siding, trim and fascia where water can penetrate. Seal any areas where water can get behind the siding such as at windows and doors. Repair any plumbing leaks that are discovered. And replace any significantly rotted wood.

This process may sound like a lot of work, and perhaps that is why it is neglected by so many homeowners. It will take a while to do the first time, but should go much more quickly each time after that if it is done on a regular basis. Making this process a regular part of your home maintenance plan will help to keep your home in good condition and to preserve your home's value.

Below are some pictures of various types of water damage.

Rot on roof decking.

Rot on underside of roof decking

Subfloor rot.

Serious rot on subfloor.

More serious rot on a subfloor.


Rot on fascia board.

Rot on underside of roof decking.


Rot on window sill

Severe rot on window trim

Rot on siding

This is the result of wood installed in direct contact with soil or concrete

Wood installed against concrete

Rot on garage door casing


Signs of dampness in a crawlspace

Water damage on interior wall

Serious water damage on interior wall

Water damage on ceiling

\Water damage on ceiling

Loose or damaged tile can allow water to get behind tiles and cause serious damage

Trees or foliage against a home can damage the siding and can hold moisture against the home

Bare wood such as this will not last long