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SINK CABINETS, CHEMICAL STORAGE, AND CAULKING AND GROUTING

Sink cabinets and chemical storage

Think about what's typically located in your sink cabinets: the underside of metal sinks, garbage disposal metal casing, copper water supply pipes, and plastic or metal drainage pipes. Plastic and metal are affected by corrosive chemicals, and continued corrosion and rusting can eventually result in leaks. Most people, though, store common household cleaning products and supplies in the sink cabinets (see Figure 1). This is the absolute wrong place to store such items because most cleaning chemicals by their very nature are corrosive. So, *do not store chemicals in sink cabinets!* Additionally, children won't gain access to harmful and dangerous chemicals. And no one ever takes all those chemicals out of the sink cabinets to inspect the cabinet floor and the water and drainage pipes—unless they're moving, a significant leak is noticed, or a child is injured after gaining access to the chemicals.

Figure 1. Poor storage of chemicals in sink cabinets.

Water supply and drainage pipes should be monitored regularly, and here's how to do it virtually on a daily basis with no effort at all on your part: Store dry materials (towels, bathroom tissue, boxes, etc.) in sink cabinets (see Figure 2). This type of storage allows one to check for leaks in sink cabinets each time something dry is removed. If normally dry materials are wet, check for leaks or deteriorated caulking/grouting around the sink and countertop, and have a qualified plumber repair or replace any plumbing components or have the deteriorated caulking/grouting repaired.

Figure 2. Good storage of dry materials in sink cabinets.

So where should you store such chemicals? A cabinet out of the reach of young children in the garage or at an exterior location is great, but if you must keep them inside, an upper hallway closet, the cabinet above the microwave oven, or the cabinet above the refrigerator make good interior locations. As with all chemicals, however, make sure the cover is tightly closed and secured so that it doesn't spill when you reach for it and accidentally knock it over or drop it. If you do have to keep chemicals in lower cabinets or drawers, make sure those cabinets and drawers have child-proof latches on them.

Dissimilar materials

Multiple dissimilar materials typically are used for drain pipes at the sinks (e.g., brass, chrome, copper, and/or plastic connecting to each other). While common, the condition does create a maintenance concern simply because different materials expand and contract at different rates when exposed to hot and cold water, causing loose connections with age and use. Loose connections can result in water and drainage leaks, which can cause major property damage if not detected immediately. **Recommend daily homeowner monitoring and maintenance.**

Caulking and grouting

Caulking and grouting is typically found in the kitchen, bathrooms, and laundry area at connections between the toilet and floor; the bathtub, floor, and wall; the shower, floor, and wall; and sink and countertop.

Deteriorated or cracked caulking or grouting can allow moisture to penetrate into structural framing, causing water damage or promoting the growth of mold (click here for helpful information on mold and mold remediation). It is impossible to tell how long deteriorated grouting or caulking has existed, and moisture might have penetrated subject areas and caused damage which is not visible and can only be determined by remodeling/renovation or destructive testing. Before deteriorated grouting or caulking is repaired, the substructure should be examined for evidence of structural damage or deterioration.

Recaulking and regrouting is common homeowner maintenance. While recaulking and regrouting normally is not a cause for concern, and homeowner maintenance typically is to be applauded, in today's world of mold disclosure and mold claims (click here for helpful information on mold and mold remediation), Client should understand that the time of, and reason for, the recaulking or regrouting cannot be determined and that moisture penetration into the structural framing might have occurred, possibly causing structural damage or promoting mold growth. Remodeling or removal of shower and/or bathtub sections, flooring, wallpaper, wall mirrors, etc., could reveal moisture damage or structural damage that was concealed at the time of the inspection; concealed defects are not within the scope of the home inspection.
Also note that some household chemicals can damage or deteriorate some caulkings and grouts. So make sure you read the instructions on the chemical containers before using them.

Damaged or loose tiles

Damaged and loose tiles create the same type of problems as deteriorated caulking and grouting. Any moisture penetrating behind the tiles can cause moisture damage and mold growth within the wall cavity. A definitive assessment might require destructive or invasive testing, which is not within the scope of the home inspection. Large cracks in tiles, lots of cracked tiles, or lots of loose tiles could be signs of more serious structural and moisture problems in the area.

Worst case

In a worst-case scenario, the wall could collapse if deteriorated grouting or caulking, loose tiles, or damaged tiles are not taken care of (see Figure 3).

Renovation

If you are planning any renovation, HOMETEAM recommends adding a contingency amount (we use 25% of the estimated expense) into your budget to cover unforeseen problems.

Figure 3. The result of deteriorated grouting and caulking.

If you have any questions, or if you found an inactive link, please contact us.

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