Building Materials with High Moisture Content Not Enclosed

Scope

Do not install drywall if framing and/or insulation materials are damp.

- Inspect framing, sheathing, and insulation for dampness before installing drywall and other wall materials that would limit the framing and insulation’s ability to dry out.
- Test the framing with a moisture meter to ensure the lumber moisture content is ≤18%, as recommended by ENERGY STAR.
- If damp, allow materials to air dry or dry with fans before enclosing the walls.
- Follow the manufacturer’s specifications when installing wet-applied insulation products to ensure an adequate amount of drying time.

See the Compliance Tab for related codes and standards requirements, and criteria to meet national programs such as DOE’s Zero Energy Ready Home program, ENERGY STAR Certified Homes, and Indoor airPLUS.
Moisture that gets trapped inside a home during construction can lead to mold and mildew (and associated indoor air quality issues) as well as rotting and failure of structural elements. There are several ways moisture can get into buildings under construction. Lumber and materials can arrive at the site wet, they can get wet due to rain or snowfall during construction, or they can sit on wet ground unprotected. These materials must be allowed to dry out before the drywall is installed. The most common wet building material is dimensional lumber used for framing. This material usually arrives at the jobsite early and will be exposed to the elements longer than other building materials. See the guide No Visible Signs of water Damage or Mold for ways to protect materials from water damage at the job site. There are also many construction materials, like cement, concrete, wet-installed insulation, and fluid-applied flashing, that are installed wet and must be allowed to cure and dry before the house is closed in. Builders should follow manufacturer's instructions for drying times and allow plenty of time in the construction schedule to accommodate those drying times. If interior walls are enclosed (e.g., with drywall) when framing materials and insulation are wet, the trapped moisture can lead to problems for the home. Therefore, it is essential to do the following before enclosing the interior walls:

- Test the moisture content of building materials and ensure that lumber does not exceed 18% moisture content.
- Follow the manufacturer’s drying specifications for wet-applied insulation products.

![Figure 1 - Wet-Applied Insulation that is Still Drying. The dark spots on this wet-spray cellulose insulation indicate that it is not dry, and it must be allowed to dry completely before the wall is enclosed.](image)

**Measuring Moisture Content of Framing Materials**

If framing materials appear wet, you must test them using a moisture meter. Moisture meters will give you a reliable benchmark to evaluate whether or not the materials can be safely installed in the home.

To test the moisture content of wood, you can use a resistance meter. A resistance meter measures the moisture by sending a small electrical charge through two probes inserted into the lumber. If the wood is wet, the charge will pass easily between the probes; dry wood offers greater resistance and less charge will pass (Curkeet 2011). Some moisture meters have additional features that allow the units to be calibrated for different kinds of wood, but usually at a higher cost. In general you can expect to spend between $500 and $650 on a moisture meter that will be suitable for residential construction (PNNL 2012).

**How to Use a Moisture Meter (Curkeet 2011):**

1. Insert the probes at least 1/4 inch into the wood to get an accurate measurement.
2. Insert the probes parallel with the grain of the wood.
3. Do not try to test wood on the ends; this will not give an accurate measurement.
4. Test in multiple locations along the lumber to get an accurate assessment. The meter only measures the moisture content between the probes. Although moisture can saturate an entire piece of lumber, it also can only impact a small section; therefore, you should test multiple areas of the wood to ensure the entire piece is dry enough to install and enclose.
5. If the material has a high moisture content, allow it to dry until it is under the required moisture threshold. Use dehumidifiers, fans, and gentle heat to shorten the drying time and lessen the impact on the construction schedule (EPA 2013).
Figure 2 - Meters for Measuring Moisture in Building Materials. It is important not to enclose the interior of a wall (e.g., with drywall) if a high moisture content is detected in either the framing members or the insulation products.

Follow Manufacturer’s Specifications When Drying Wet-Applied Insulation Products

Some insulation products, such as fiberglass batts, are supposed to be dry at all times. However, other products, such as open cell and closed cell spray foam insulations, are wet applied. It is critical to ensure these wet-applied products are fully dried (and cured, if required) before enclosing them. Follow this overall guidance:

1. Apply insulation per manufacturer’s directions.

2. Allow insulation to dry and/or cure according to the manufacturer’s specifications. Although this will depend on the type of insulation used, in general allow as much access to airflow as possible for drying. If recommended, a fan can help speed drying times. However, this can impact any curing that may need to occur, so be sure to check with the manufacturer first.
Ensuring Success

It is critical to ensure the materials in the wall cavity are dry before being enclosed. When in doubt, use a moisture meter to determine exactly what percentage of moisture is in the material. Also, be sure that any wet-applied insulation is fully cured so you do not trap moisture in the wall assembly.
Climate

No climate-specific information applies.
Training

Right and Wrong Images

Display Image: ES_WMSBC_4.4_4.5_PG60_134g_32311.jpg

Display Image: Picture1.png
CAD
None Available
Compliance

The Compliance tab contains both program and code information. Code language is excerpted and summarized below. For exact code language, refer to the applicable code, which may require purchase from the publisher. While we continually update our database, links may have changed since posting. Please contact our webmaster if you find broken links.

**ENERGY STAR Certified Homes, Version 3/3.1 (Rev. 09)**

Water Management System Builder Requirements

4.5 Framing members & insulation products having high moisture content not enclosed (e.g., with drywall).\(^{18}\)

Footnote 18) For wet-applied insulation, follow manufacturer’s drying recommendations. EPA recommends that lumber moisture content be \(\leq 18\%\).

**DOE Zero Energy Ready Home (Revision 07)**

Exhibit 1 Mandatory Requirements.

Exhibit 1, Item 1) Certified under the ENERGY STAR Qualified Homes Program or the ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction Program.
More Info.

Access to some references may require purchase from the publisher. While we continually update our database, links may have changed since posting. Please contact our webmaster if you find broken links.

Case Studies

1. New Whole-House Solutions Case Study: New Traditions Homes, Landover Commons, Vancouver, WA
   (873KB)
   Author(s): PNNL
   Organization(s): PNNL
   Publication Date: April, 2012
   Case study about energy efficient new home construction that also incorporated moisture management techniques for durability in the damp Northwest climate.

References and Resources*

1. DOE Zero Energy Ready Home National Program Requirements (Rev. 07)
   Author(s): U.S. Department of Energy
   Organization(s): DOE
   Publication Date: May, 2019
   Standard requirements for DOE's Zero Energy Ready Home national program certification.

2. ENERGY STAR Certified Homes, Version 3/3.1 (Rev. 09) National Program Requirements
   Author(s): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
   Organization(s): EPA
   Publication Date: September, 2018
   Webpage with links to documents providing the program requirements and checklists for ENERGY STAR Certified Homes (Ver. 3/3.1, Rev. 09).

3. EPA Indoor airPLUS Construction Specifications, Version 1 (Rev. 04)
   Author(s): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
   Organization(s): EPA
   Publication Date: February, 2018
   Website providing the technical specifications and related documents for home builders, subcontractors, architects, and other housing professionals interested in certifying a home to the EPA's Indoor airPLUS program requirements.

4. Water Management System Builder Checklist Guide
   Author(s): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
   Organization(s): EPA
   Publication Date: February, 2011
   Guide describing details that serve as a visual reference for each of the line items in the Water Management System Builder Checklist.

*Publication dates are shown for formal documents. Dates are not shown for non-dated media. Access dates for referenced, non-dated media, such as web sites, are shown in the measure guide text.

Contributors to this Guide

The following authors and organizations contributed to the content in this Guide.

Steve Easley & Associates
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency