



Introduction

Wood is an inherently durable material which is resistant to biological attack provided it remains dry. The purpose of this article is to explain the different types of timber rot, how to identify them and the methods of treatment available.

Dry Rot (*Serpula lacrymans*)

The name 'dry rot' might be considered rather inappropriate since like all wood destroying fungi it requires water for germination, growth and survival. Indeed, moisture is the fundamental need of all wood destroying fungi plus a food source (wood). Without either the fungus ceases to grow and dies. The term "Dry Rot" is believed to have originated in the eighteenth century. Timber constructed ships were placed in to dry dock for the winter and dry rot would form during these months.

Dry rot occurs when the moisture content of timber is elevated to around 20% - 30%. Fungus is then able to attack and digest the timber causing the timber to gradually lose its strength. If left untreated the fungus can spread rapidly and even through masonry and plaster.

Dry rot can be identified by the following characteristics:

- Shrunken brown timber
- Cuboidal cracking
- Musty, damp smell
- Fruiting bodies on the timber.



Dry rot tends to prefer dark, unventilated areas and can therefore go unnoticed for lengthy periods.



Wet Rot

Wet rot can occur when the moisture content of timber is elevated to at least 50% and typically a continuous source of moisture will be present. Identifying the exact type of wet rot can be difficult, as there are many different types of fungus associated with wet rot. As a guide the following are signs to look out for if wet rot is suspected:

- Damp odour.
- Fungal growth.
- Soft and spongy feel and likely darker than surrounding timber.
- It will easily crack and crumble into fine pieces if dried out.



Moisture and Rot

All forms of rot require a source of moisture to grow and spread. It is therefore essential that the source of moisture is eliminated at the earliest opportunity. Some typical causes of moisture ingress into buildings leading to rot are as follows:

- Defective plumbing
- Poor ventilation (typical for dry rot)
- Rising damp
- Defective roof coverings
- Defective rainwater goods
- Saturation through the exterior envelope

Any defects identified (as the primary source of moisture ingress) would need to be dealt with as part of the overall package of remedial work.



Treatment

Treatment of Wet Rot

1. Establish the size and extent of the rot
2. If structural timbers are affected a structural engineer might be required
3. Locate and eliminate the source of moisture
4. Promote rapid drying of the structure
5. Introduce support measures (including improved ventilation, damp proof membranes)
6. Remove all rotten / decayed timber
7. Replace the rotten timber with preservative pre-treated wood
8. New timber sections to be married in with retained timber to promote element stability

Treatment for Dry Rot

1. Repeat items 1 through to 6 as for the wet rot treatment
2. Extend the rot removal by cutting away timber 1 metre beyond the last evidence of fungus or rot.
3. Apply surface biocides, fungicidal paints or renders to wall surfaces.
4. As per item 7 & 8 above.

How Can We Help?

At Harris Associates we have extensive knowledge of identifying and treating both types of rot. Our services include:

- Identifying the type of rot
- Identifying the causes of the rot
- Producing tailored specifications of works
- Engaging with specialist contractors
- Engaging with other professionals
- Overseeing the repair / reinstatement works

For further advice and guidance on any of the above issues or indeed any property related matter please do contact us.

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