



NEWS

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MAINTAINING YOUR HOME DURING A DROUGHT

"The ongoing drought continues to affect much of southern and some of central Queensland. As well as affecting our everyday lives its consequences are also impacting upon the homes in which we live," said BSA's general manager, Ian Jennings.

"The excessively dry weather has resulted in soils upon which our homes are built drying to extremes not previously experienced. Additionally, the roots of trees, shrubs and other vegetation have been forced to extend beyond their normal reach in search of moisture."

The effect this has on our homes is largely dependent upon the type of soil they are built on. Homes built on highly reactive clay soils are at risk of damage whilst those built on less reactive sandy soils are less at risk.

The volume of clay soils changes significantly with variations in moisture content, swelling with increased moisture and shrinking with decreased moisture.

"Where changes in moisture occur under or around the footings of a building, the soil swells or contracts in the local area causing the footings supported by the soil to heave or subside. The footing and slab system is usually able to accommodate such movement, however, brittle brickwork and plasterboard supported on the footings sometimes can't, and cracks appear in these components. Additionally, soil movement can cause doors and windows to be pushed out of alignment causing them to bind or fail to latch," said Mr Jennings.

So, what can home owners do to reduce the likelihood of damage to their homes?

"In extremely dry conditions the introduction of even small amounts of water around the footings can cause localised heaving. Accordingly, it is vitally important that good site drainage around the dwelling is maintained," advises Mr Jennings.

Mr Jennings encourages home owners follow these simple steps to reduce the risk of subsidence affecting their home:

- Ensure taps and hoses do not drip or leak adjacent to the home
- Avoid placing garden beds or installing sprinkler systems next to dwellings and plant trees and shrubs a minimum distance of twice their mature height away from the home
- Ensure gutters and down pipes do not leak
- Ensure watering of pot plants does not result in over flow water spilling adjacent to the footings
- Ensure sealants between any concrete slabs, driveways etc and the home are maintained in a watertight condition
- Ensure the pressure relief valve on the hot water system does not discharge water adjacent to the footings.

- Ensure the ground level around the home falls away from the building and any surface water is directed away from the home and is not permitted to pond near the footings.
- On rural properties equipped with effluent disposal or septic systems ensure that effluent discharge water does not discharge near or immediately uphill from the home.

"In the extreme dry conditions and even if good site drainage is maintained, home owners need to expect that some minor cracking of finishes and slight binding of doors and windows may occur and rectification of these falls under the home owner's maintenance responsibilities. If movement becomes excessive then owners should refer their concerns to their builders. If the home is less than 6 years and 3 months old and their builder fails to adequately address their concerns the matter should be referred to the BSA for investigation.

"Builders for their part should consider any concerns raised by owners seriously and inspect the home to ensure the owners have complied with their maintenance responsibilities. If site drainage has been maintained and movement appears excessive the matter should be referred to the engineer who designed the footing system for his investigation.

"If the matter can not be resolved between the builder and the owner and the home is less than 6 years and 3 months old, the owner should phone BSA on 1300 272 272 for further advice."