

It's a good idea to regularly inspect your rental property, outside and inside. Inspections help you check everything's working well, that there's no damage, and that your tenants are keeping things reasonably clean and tidy. You will also find that carrying out a property inspection every three or four months is probably a condition of your insurance cover on the property.

Under S.48 of the Residential Tenancies Act the landlord has the right of entry into the tenanted property to carry out a property inspection provided a number of conditions are met.

There are a number of aids that will allow you to carry out a property inspection properly, thoroughly and efficiently, and one of these is a moisture meter.

Interior water leaks can cause substantial damage if not identified early, and during an inspection you should take steps to monitor the levels of moisture present in the floor. Moisture meters are used to measure this. They can detect otherwise hidden leaks from kitchen, bathroom and hot water systems. This measurement allows you to find out whether the moisture levels in a given floor location are appropriate, or if further investigations need to be made.

There are two main types of moisture meter - pin and pinless. Portable pin-type moisture meters feature small steel probes, which are inserted into the flooring material to effectively gauge the moisture level. The material probing process is followed by the circulation of current between two points, with the level of resistance translating into a moisture content value. The pin-type moisture meter allows for a greater range of depth readings than the pinless variety, and are recommended for this type of inspection work. These meters are typically used to determine the level of moisture in materials such as plaster, plasterboard, concrete, and wood and are the best way to identify the exact location of water damage behind walls, in subfloors or in any other area where moisture may be hidden behind another surface.

The best technique is to check and record the moisture level readings in hall floors that back against bathrooms, shower, hot-water cylinders and laundries. Compare these readings with those from your previous inspection, and any sudden increase is a good indication of a developing problem requiring immediate investigation and rectification.

You should be aware that a moisture reading of anywhere up to 18% in New Zealand is quite normal and gives no cause for concern. However, moisture readings in excess of 20% indicate the need for further inspection. Levels between 25-30% indicate that there may be water ingress, meaning that remedial work could be required. It's also worth bearing in mind that environmental conditions will have an impact on the moisture readings, with higher levels of moisture expected on wet days.

Simple and reliable moisture meters that can do an excellent job are available at Bunnings or other trade merchants for around \$100, and using one can save you thousands by the early detection of potentially expensive water damage.

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