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Frequently Asked Questions About Vapor Retarders by [Comisky](#)

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Water vapor travels from high pressure to low pressure. This is why enclosed spaces like the basement feel damp more than any other areas of the house. The moisture in the soil is literally pushed through the walls and floors. This moisture could damage the insulation and even the framing members, but a vapor retarder can prevent this from happening.

Vapor retarders are sheets of plastic that are used to prevent water from seeping through the basement walls and floors. These heavy duty materials are readily available at any home depot or hardware store anywhere in the country. Vapor retarders have been in use in virtually all types of construction since it was first used in the early 1960s. Below are common questions people ask about moisture in houses and how vapor retarders can help.

Q: Will opening the windows help reduce the dampness in a basement?

A: Generally, opening the windows is not a good idea. Opening a window may not provide enough ventilation and instead provide the basement with more moisture-laden air. The best way to keep basement humidity under control is to run a dehumidifier.

Q: Where does the vapor retarder go when finishing a basement wall?

A: Finishing a basement wall means that you are adding a layer to the basement wall. This means that there will be two main layers to your basement wall: the foundation wall and the stud wall. Adding a stud wall will make the foundation wall warmer, so condensation is more likely to form on its surface. Vapor barriers always go on the warm side of the wall; in this case, it should be placed right between the two main layers.

Q: When using vapor retarders in ceilings, on what layer do you put it?

A: As mentioned earlier, the vapor retarder always goes to the warm side: between the ceiling and the insulation. The heavy plastic is not necessary between the insulation and the space above it. One of the functions of the space is to carry away any moisture that migrates into the insulation.

Q: Is it true that vapor retarders in ceilings cause problems?

A: Problems usually occur when the plastic is installed during the winter. When a contractor does the ceiling finishing, it may sag because of the moisture. This is usually because the contractor did not insulate the attic before beginning the finishing. Moisture from the finishing condenses against the heavy plastic and dampens the ceiling. If the ceiling was first insulated, the vapor retarder would be warm, and condensation wouldn't occur.

Learn more about heavy plastic vapor retarders at askthebuilder.com/category/qa/new-construction/vapor-barrier/. It pays to know what goes on behind and between the walls of your house.

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