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Technical Topic

Drywall Cracks and Screw Pops

Drywall cracks and screw pops can be concerning to see in a newly built home, but in most cases, they are normal cosmetic conditions that occur as the home settles and materials adjust. This technical bulletin outlines the causes, expectations, seasonal behavior, and homeowner guidance related to drywall cracks and screw pops in new homes.

1. Purpose of This Bulletin:

The purpose of this bulletin is to explain:

- Why drywall cracks and screw pops can occur in new homes
- What conditions are considered normal
- What conditions may require further review
- How homeowners can help minimize cosmetic movement

2. Why Drywall Cracks and Screw Pops Occur:

A newly constructed home is made from various materials—wood framing, drywall, fasteners, and concrete—that respond differently to temperature and moisture changes. As these materials dry, shrink, expand, and shift slightly, cosmetic changes can become visible at drywall joints and fastener locations.

3. Drywall Cracks:

Hairline drywall cracks most commonly appear:

- At wall and ceiling joints
- Where walls meet ceilings
- Near doors, windows, or stair openings

Common causes include:

- Normal structural settling during the first year
- Wood framing drying and shrinking as indoor humidity stabilizes
- Seasonal temperature and humidity changes, particularly during the first heating season

These cracks are typically cosmetic in nature and do not impact the structural integrity or safety of the home.

4. Screw Pops:

Screw pops appear as small bumps or circular marks on the drywall surface. They occur when a drywall fastener slightly backs out or shifts as the framing behind it moves.

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Common reasons include:

- Natural wood movement as framing dries
- Seasonal expansion and contraction of framing members
- Minor settling of the structure

Screw pops are common in new homes and are not an indication of poor workmanship or structural failure.

5. Seasonal Drywall Expectations:

First Year Conditions

The first 12 months after construction typically show the most visible drywall changes because:

- The home transitions from construction moisture levels to normal living conditions
- Heating systems dry out framing materials during winter
- Summer humidity causes minor expansion

Winter Months

- Indoor air is drier
- Wood framing shrinks slightly
- Small cracks may appear or become more noticeable

Spring and Summer

- Increased humidity can reduce the appearance of some cracks
- New minor cracks may appear as materials adjust

These seasonal cycles are normal and tend to stabilize after the first year.

6. What Is Considered Normal:

In most new homes, it is normal to observe:

- Small hairline drywall cracks
- Minor nail or screw pops
- Slight joint lines visible under certain lighting conditions

These items are typically classified as cosmetic conditions, not construction defects.

7. What Is Not Typical:

Homeowners should contact their builder if they observe:

- Large or widening cracks
- Cracks that continue to grow over time
- Doors or windows that suddenly do not open or close properly
- Cracks accompanied by noticeable floor or wall movement

These situations are uncommon and may require further evaluation.

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8. Homeowner Best Practices:

To help minimize cosmetic drywall movement:

- Maintain consistent indoor humidity levels (generally 30–50%)
- Use exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms
- Avoid rapid temperature swings when possible
- Plan cosmetic drywall repairs after the home has experienced at least one full seasonal cycle

9. Warranty Considerations:

Many builders address drywall cracks and screw pops under a one-year workmanship or cosmetic warranty. Repairs are often scheduled near the end of this period to allow the home to complete its initial settling phase before final cosmetic repairs are performed.

10. Summary:

Small drywall cracks and screw pops are a normal part of new home construction and typically reflect natural material movement rather than a construction deficiency. As the home completes its first year and seasonal cycles, these conditions usually stabilize and can be easily repaired.

Technical Services Team