

OTTAWA WINDOW PROS

Common Problems

Drafts, sticking sashes, failed seals, and other
window faults

10 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

ottawawindowinstall.ca/construction-brain

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Q1

My windows get filthy so fast on the outside - is there something wrong with them?

Dirty windows are usually an environmental issue rather than a window problem. Most window dirt comes from external factors like pollen, dust, vehicle exhaust, and weather patterns rather than defects in the windows themselves.

Common causes of rapidly dirty windows include living near busy roads where vehicle exhaust and road dust settle on glass, seasonal pollen from trees and plants (especially heavy in Ottawa's spring months), construction or landscaping work nearby that kicks up dust, and poor drainage around your home that splashes mud onto lower windows during rain. Windows facing prevailing winds also tend to collect more airborne particles.

Ottawa's climate contributes significantly to window dirt accumulation. Our spring pollen season is particularly intense, and winter road salt can leave residue that attracts more dirt. The freeze-thaw cycles common here can also cause soil and debris to splash onto windows during melting periods.

Check your window surroundings for specific dirt sources. Overhanging trees drop sap, leaves, and provide surfaces for birds that can soil windows. Sprinkler systems hitting windows leave mineral deposits that attract more dirt. If you have older windows with deteriorating caulking or weatherstripping, gaps might collect dirt that then washes down the glass during rain.

The windows themselves are likely fine unless you notice issues like condensation between glass panes (indicating seal failure), difficulty opening or closing, or drafts. Modern windows with quality seals and proper installation shouldn't contribute to dirt accumulation. However, if your windows are very old, upgrading to new energy-efficient windows with better seals and easier-to-clean features might reduce maintenance needs.

For a read on whether your windows need replacing or it's purely environmental, request a free quote through Ottawa Window Pros and have an installer look at them.

Q2

Why is there condensation on the outside of my windows in the morning?

Exterior window condensation in the morning is actually a good sign - it means your windows are energy efficient and properly insulating your home from outdoor temperature changes.

This condensation forms when your window glass surface is cooler than the outdoor air temperature and humidity level. During Ottawa's cool mornings, especially in spring and fall, the outdoor air contains moisture that condenses into water droplets when it contacts your cooler window surface. It's the same process that creates dew on grass - the glass acts like a cold surface that moisture in the air clings to.

Modern energy-efficient windows actually promote this exterior condensation because they're doing their job of keeping indoor heat inside rather than transferring it through the glass. Older, less efficient windows would warm up from indoor heat transfer, preventing this natural condensation process. So if you're seeing morning dew on the outside of your windows, your windows are likely performing well thermally.

In Ottawa's climate, this is particularly common during shoulder seasons when overnight temperatures drop significantly but daytime humidity remains higher. The condensation typically disappears as the sun rises and warms the glass surface, or as outdoor humidity levels change throughout the day.

The key difference from problematic condensation is location - exterior condensation is normal and harmless, while interior condensation between glass panes indicates seal failure, and excessive interior condensation suggests humidity control issues. If you're seeing condensation on the inside surface of your windows or between glass panes, that would warrant attention from a window professional.

If you have questions about how your own windows are performing, request a free quote through Ottawa Window Pros — an installer can look at them and talk through any condensation or thermal concerns.

Q3

There's water getting in around my window frame when it rains - what's going on?

Water infiltration around window frames is typically caused by failed weatherstripping, damaged caulking, or improper installation - and it needs immediate attention to prevent structural damage and mold growth.

The most common culprit is **deteriorated exterior caulking** around the window frame where it meets your home's siding. Over time, this caulk shrinks, cracks, or pulls away, creating gaps that allow water to penetrate. You might also have worn **weatherstripping** around the window sash that's no longer creating a proper seal when the window is closed.

More serious causes include improper flashing installation during the original window installation, or the window itself settling and creating gaps in the frame. In Ottawa's freeze-thaw climate, these small gaps can expand significantly during winter, making the problem worse each year. Sometimes the issue isn't the window at all - it

could be water running down from a roof leak or damaged siding above the window.

Start with a visual inspection on a dry day. Look for obvious gaps, cracked caulk, or damaged weatherstripping around the entire window perimeter. Check both inside and outside. During the next rainfall, try to pinpoint exactly where the water is entering - this will help determine if it's a simple caulking job or something more complex.

For minor caulking issues, you can apply exterior-grade polyurethane or silicone caulk as a temporary fix, but if water is getting into the wall cavity or if you see multiple entry points, this likely requires professional attention. An experienced installer can properly assess whether the window needs adjustment, new flashing, or complete replacement.

For a thorough assessment of your window's condition and proper repair recommendations, consider getting a free consultation from Ottawa Window Pros - water damage only gets worse with time.

Q4

There's white powdery stuff appearing on my vinyl window frames - what is that?

The white powdery substance on your vinyl window frames is most likely efflorescence - mineral deposits that appear when moisture evaporates and leaves behind salt crystals. This is actually coming from nearby masonry or concrete, not the vinyl itself.

Efflorescence occurs when water moves through brick, concrete, or mortar around your window opening and then evaporates on or near the vinyl frame surface. The water carries dissolved minerals (mainly salts) that crystallize into that chalky white powder when the moisture dries. This is particularly common in Ottawa's freeze-thaw climate where ice and snow create moisture cycles around windows.

The good news is that efflorescence itself isn't harmful to your vinyl windows - vinyl doesn't absorb water or contribute minerals. However, it does indicate moisture movement in the surrounding masonry, which you'll want to address. You can clean the white residue with a soft brush and mild detergent solution, but it may return if the underlying moisture issue isn't resolved.

In Ottawa's climate, this often happens during spring thaw or after heavy rains when moisture penetrates exterior masonry and migrates toward the warmer interior. Check your window caulking, weep holes, and exterior brick pointing for gaps that might allow water penetration. Poor drainage around the foundation can also contribute to this issue.

If the problem persists or you notice actual water infiltration, it's worth having a professional assess the window installation and surrounding masonry. Proper flashing and sealing during window installation prevents most moisture issues, and any gaps should be addressed promptly to protect your home's structure.

Q5

I see rainbow colors in my window glass - is that a problem or normal?

Rainbow colors or iridescent effects in window glass are typically normal and not a cause for concern. This optical phenomenon is usually harmless and occurs due to the way light interacts with modern window coatings and glass manufacturing processes.

The rainbow effect you're seeing is most commonly caused by **Low-E (low-emissivity) coatings** applied to energy-efficient windows. These microscopically thin metallic coatings are designed to reflect heat while allowing

light to pass through, significantly improving your window's insulation performance. When sunlight hits these coatings at certain angles, it can create prismatic effects similar to what you'd see with a soap bubble or oil slick on water.

Double-pane and triple-pane windows can also produce rainbow effects due to slight variations in glass thickness or minor stress patterns that develop during manufacturing or installation. In Ottawa's climate, thermal expansion and contraction cycles can occasionally enhance these optical effects, particularly during seasonal temperature changes.

When to be concerned: If the rainbow effect is accompanied by actual cracks in the glass, fogging between panes, or if the colors are extremely pronounced and interfering with visibility, these could indicate seal failure or glass stress issues that warrant professional inspection.

For most homeowners in Ottawa, these rainbow colors are simply a byproduct of having quality, energy-efficient windows with advanced coatings that help reduce heating costs during our cold winters. The slight visual trade-off is typically worth the significant energy savings these windows provide.

If the effect bothers you or seems excessive, a window professional can assess whether it's within normal parameters for your specific window type and installation.

Q6

My window glass cracked for no reason - what could have caused that?

Spontaneous glass cracking in windows is usually caused by thermal stress, manufacturing defects, or structural settling - it's more common than many homeowners realize and rarely indicates anything dangerous.

Thermal stress is the most frequent culprit, especially during Ottawa's extreme temperature swings. When part of your window glass heats up faster than another part (like when morning sun hits a partially shaded window), the glass expands unevenly and can crack. This is particularly common with large windows, south-facing windows, or when you have heavy curtains or blinds that create temperature differences across the glass surface.

Manufacturing defects in the glass can also cause delayed cracking. Tiny imperfections or stress points in the glass that weren't visible initially can eventually lead to cracks weeks, months, or even years after installation. Double-pane windows with failed seals are especially prone to this, as moisture between the panes creates additional stress on the glass.

Structural settling of your home can put pressure on window frames, which transfers stress to the glass. This is common in newer homes (first 2-3 years) or after significant temperature changes that cause the house to expand and contract. Even minor frame distortion can be enough to crack glass.

Other potential causes include impact from flying debris you might not have noticed, vibrations from nearby construction or heavy traffic, or even pressure changes from strong winds during storms. In rare cases, the window frame itself may have been installed too tightly, creating constant pressure on the glass.

For safety and energy efficiency, cracked window glass should be replaced promptly, especially with Ottawa's harsh winters approaching. A single crack can compromise the entire window's insulation value and may worsen over time. For a free assessment of your cracked window and replacement options, request a quote from Ottawa Window Pros.

Q7

The paint around my windows keeps peeling off - is that a window problem or paint problem?

Peeling paint around windows is typically a moisture problem rather than just a paint issue, and it often indicates that your windows aren't sealing properly or there's condensation buildup.

Moisture is the main culprit behind paint failure around windows. When warm, humid indoor air meets cold window frames or glass, condensation forms. This moisture seeps into the paint film and wood trim, causing the paint to lose adhesion and peel away. In Ottawa's climate with our cold winters and temperature swings, this is especially common with older windows that lack proper weatherstripping or have failed seals in double-pane glass.

Check your window seals and weatherstripping first. Look for gaps around the window frame, cracked caulking, or visible daylight coming through. If you have double-pane windows, fogging between the glass panes means the seal has failed and moisture is getting inside the unit. Poor ventilation in the room can also contribute to excess humidity that leads to condensation and paint problems.

In Ottawa's climate, this issue is particularly common during winter months when the temperature difference between inside and outside is greatest. Older single-pane windows or windows with aluminum frames are especially prone to condensation issues because they conduct cold more readily than modern vinyl or fiberglass frames.

The solution often involves both paint and window work. You'll need to scrape and reprime the affected areas with a high-quality primer designed for moisture-prone areas, then repaint. However, if the underlying moisture problem isn't addressed through better window sealing, weatherstripping replacement, or window upgrades, the paint will likely peel again.

For persistent moisture issues around windows, a professional assessment can determine whether weatherstripping, caulking, or window replacement would be the most effective long-term solution.

Q8

My new windows make loud popping and cracking sounds - is something wrong?

Loud popping and cracking sounds from new windows are usually normal thermal expansion and contraction, but the timing and frequency matter. Most quality vinyl and composite windows will make

occasional sounds as they adjust to temperature changes, especially during the first few months after installation.

Thermal movement is the most common cause of these sounds. As temperatures fluctuate between day and night, or when heating systems cycle on and off, window frames expand and contract at different rates than the surrounding wall materials. This creates stress that releases as popping or cracking sounds. Vinyl windows are particularly prone to this because vinyl has a higher thermal expansion rate than materials like wood or aluminum.

The sounds should be occasional, not constant. If you're hearing frequent popping throughout the day, or loud cracking sounds that seem excessive, this could indicate installation issues. Improperly shimmed windows, over-tightened fasteners, or inadequate expansion gaps can cause binding that creates more dramatic sounds. In Ottawa's climate with temperature swings from -30°C to +30°C, proper installation techniques are crucial to allow for this movement.

New windows typically "settle" over the first heating and cooling season. The sounds often become less frequent as the materials acclimate to your home's thermal patterns. However, if the sounds are accompanied by visible gaps opening up, difficulty operating the windows, or drafts, these are signs of installation problems that need professional attention.

Monitor the pattern over the next few weeks - occasional pops during temperature changes are normal, but constant noise or sounds that seem to be getting worse warrant a callback from your installer to check the installation quality.

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Q9

My sliding patio door is really hard to open when it gets cold - why is that?

Cold weather makes sliding patio doors harder to operate due to thermal contraction of materials and increased friction in the track system. This is a common issue in Ottawa's harsh winters, especially with older doors.

When temperatures drop, the metal components in your patio door - including the frame, rollers, and track - contract and can bind against each other. The door panels themselves also contract, which can cause them to sit differently in the frame and create additional friction points. **Weather stripping becomes stiffer in cold weather**, adding resistance when you try to slide the door. If there's any moisture that has gotten into the track system, it can freeze and create ice buildup that blocks smooth operation.

Track debris and worn rollers compound the problem in winter conditions. Dirt, leaves, and salt residue from winter boots can accumulate in the bottom track, and when combined with moisture and freezing temperatures, this creates a grinding paste that makes sliding extremely difficult. Older doors with worn roller bearings struggle even more because the increased friction from cold weather puts additional stress on already compromised components.

In Ottawa's climate, this issue often indicates that your patio door may benefit from **professional maintenance or replacement**. Quality modern sliding doors are designed with better weatherproofing, improved roller systems, and thermal breaks that minimize these cold-weather operation problems. **Triple-pane glass and proper insulation** in newer doors also reduce the temperature differential that causes expansion and contraction issues.

Start by cleaning the track thoroughly and applying a silicone-based lubricant designed for cold weather use - never use oil-based products that can thicken in cold temperatures. If the problem persists or worsens, it may be time to consider a new energy-efficient patio door that will operate smoothly year-round while reducing your heating costs.

For a view on repair versus replacement, request a free quote through Ottawa Window Pros and have an installer assess the door.

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Why is there ice forming on the inside of my windows even though they're only 5 years old?

Interior ice formation on 5-year-old windows typically indicates excessive indoor humidity combined with poor air circulation, rather than a window defect. Even quality windows can develop ice when indoor conditions create the perfect storm for condensation.

High indoor humidity is the primary culprit behind interior window ice. During Ottawa's harsh winters, when outdoor temperatures drop well below freezing, the interior glass surface becomes extremely cold. If your home's humidity levels exceed 30-40% during winter months, that excess moisture in the air will condense on the coldest surfaces - your windows. This condensation then freezes into ice formations, especially on north-facing windows or those in poorly heated areas.

Poor air circulation around your windows compounds the problem. Heavy curtains, blinds positioned too close to the glass, or furniture blocking airflow prevents warm indoor air from reaching the window surface. Without adequate air movement, the glass stays colder and ice formation becomes more likely. Additionally, if your windows are in rooms with high moisture sources like bathrooms, kitchens, or basements without proper ventilation, localized humidity spikes can cause ice even when other windows remain clear.

In Ottawa's climate, where winter temperatures regularly hit -20°C or lower, even double-pane windows can struggle with interior ice if humidity isn't controlled. The temperature difference between your heated home (around 20°C) and the outdoor air creates a significant thermal bridge through the glass. If your 5-year-old windows are double-pane rather than triple-pane, they're more susceptible to this issue during extreme cold snaps.

To resolve this issue, start by reducing indoor humidity using exhaust fans, dehumidifiers, or improving ventilation. Ensure curtains and blinds allow air circulation around windows, and consider upgrading to triple-pane windows if the problem persists. A professional assessment can determine if your windows need better weatherstripping or if humidity control is the real solution.

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