

JUSTYN ROOK CONTRACTING

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# Troubleshooting & Problems

Diagnosing and fixing common construction and  
renovation issues

3 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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## Q1

### Why is water seeping through my basement walls?

**Water seeping through basement walls is typically caused by hydrostatic pressure from groundwater pushing against your foundation, often combined with compromised waterproofing or drainage issues.**

This is an extremely common problem in Ottawa due to our clay soil conditions and seasonal freeze-thaw cycles.

The most frequent culprit is **exterior waterproofing failure**. Most Ottawa homes built before 1990 relied on basic tar-based waterproofing that deteriorates over 20-30 years. When this barrier fails, groundwater finds its way through foundation walls via hairline cracks, mortar joints, or porous concrete. Our heavy clay soil retains water longer than sandy soils, creating sustained pressure against foundations especially during spring melt and heavy rain periods.

**Poor drainage around your foundation** significantly contributes to seepage problems. If your weeping tiles (foundation drains) are clogged with silt or tree roots, water can't drain away properly and builds up against the foundation walls. Many older Ottawa homes have clay weeping tiles that deteriorate over time, while some properties lack proper grading that slopes away from the house.

**Seasonal factors** play a major role in our climate. Ottawa's frost line extends 4 feet deep, and the freeze-thaw cycle can create new cracks in foundations each winter. Spring snowmelt combined with clay soil that doesn't drain well creates peak hydrostatic pressure - which is why many homeowners first notice seepage in March and April.

**Interior vs exterior solutions** depend on the severity and source. Minor seepage might be managed with interior waterproofing systems, but significant water intrusion typically requires exterior excavation and proper waterproofing membrane installation. This work should be done during dry months (late summer/early fall) for best results.

**Professional assessment is crucial** because water damage can lead to mold, structural issues, and decreased home value. A qualified contractor can determine whether you're dealing with surface water, groundwater, or plumbing leaks, and recommend the most cost-effective solution.

For specialized basement waterproofing expertise, visit our dedicated team at [OttawaBasements.com](https://OttawaBasements.com). **Don't delay addressing water seepage** - the problem typically worsens over time and becomes more expensive to fix. Contact us for a free assessment to determine the best approach for your specific situation and protect your investment.

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## Q2

### Why is my drywall cracking near the corners?

**Drywall cracks near corners are typically caused by structural settling, temperature changes, or improper installation techniques** - and in Ottawa's climate with significant seasonal temperature swings, this is a very common issue that most homeowners will encounter.

The most frequent culprit is **house settling**, which is completely normal, especially in Ottawa's clay soil conditions. As your home's foundation settles over time, it creates slight movements that show up as hairline cracks where drywall sheets meet at corners. This is particularly common in newer homes (first 2-3 years) or after major renovations when new weight has been added to the structure.

**Temperature and humidity fluctuations** also play a major role in our Ottawa climate. The dramatic swings from -30°C winters to +35°C summers cause building materials to expand and contract at different rates. Wood framing moves more than drywall, creating stress at corner joints where these materials meet. This is why you'll often notice cracks appearing or worsening after particularly harsh winters or during spring thaw.

**Installation issues** can also cause corner cracking. If the original drywall installation didn't use proper corner bead, insufficient joint compound, or if the installer rushed the taping process, these corners become weak points. Paper tape that wasn't properly embedded or mesh tape without adequate compound coverage will eventually fail under normal house movement.

**Moisture problems** shouldn't be overlooked, especially in Ottawa's humid summers. If there's a plumbing leak, poor ventilation, or basement moisture issues, the drywall compound can soften and crack. This is particularly common in bathrooms, kitchens, and basements where humidity levels fluctuate significantly.

For **minor hairline cracks** (less than 1/8 inch), this is typically cosmetic and can be addressed with some mesh tape and joint compound during your next painting project. However, if you're seeing **larger cracks, multiple cracks appearing quickly, or cracks that keep returning** after repair, this could indicate a more serious structural issue that needs professional assessment.

**When to call a professional:** If cracks are wider than a quarter-inch, if they're accompanied by doors/windows that stick, or if you notice multiple cracks appearing throughout the house, it's time for a contractor to evaluate whether there's an underlying structural issue that needs addressing before any cosmetic repairs.

For a proper assessment of recurring or concerning cracks, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation - we can determine whether you're dealing with normal settling or something that requires structural attention.

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Q3

## Why does my kitchen sink drain smell bad?

**A smelly kitchen sink drain is typically caused by food debris, grease buildup, or a dry P-trap, and can usually be resolved with some simple cleaning steps.** The most common culprit is organic matter that's accumulated in your drain and started decomposing, creating that unpleasant odor.

**Food debris and grease buildup** are the primary causes of kitchen sink odors. Even with a garburator, small particles of food can stick to the sides of your drain pipes, especially when mixed with cooking oils and fats. Over time, this creates a perfect environment for bacteria to grow. In Ottawa's older homes (many built in the 1950s-70s), cast iron drain lines are particularly prone to this buildup due to their rougher interior surfaces compared to modern PVC pipes.

**The P-trap underneath your sink** might also be the source of the smell. This curved section of pipe is designed to hold water, creating a seal that prevents sewer gases from coming up through your drain. If you have a secondary sink that's rarely used, or if there's been a plumbing issue, the P-trap can dry out and allow sewer odors to enter your kitchen. This is especially common in Ottawa homes during our dry winter months when indoor humidity is low.

**Simple solutions to try first** include pouring boiling water down the drain to dissolve grease, followed by a mixture of baking soda and white vinegar. Let it sit for 15 minutes, then flush with more hot water. For garburator odors, grind ice cubes and citrus peels to clean the blades and freshen the unit. Running cold water during and after garburator use helps flush debris completely through Ottawa's municipal sewer system.

**When to call a professional** becomes necessary if the odor persists after cleaning, if you notice slow drainage, or if the smell seems to be coming from the wall or floor around your sink. These could indicate a more serious issue like a cracked drain line, improper venting, or problems with your home's main sewer connection. In Ottawa's freeze-thaw climate, older homes sometimes develop cracks in drain lines that allow sewer gases to escape into living spaces.

If basic cleaning doesn't solve the problem, it's worth having a licensed plumber inspect your drain system to identify any underlying issues before they become more expensive repairs.

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