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Whether plaster or drywall, the interior walls and ceilings of your home may require occasional maintenance. The most common problems associated with them include holes, cracks, water damage and stains. The sooner you repair problems, the easier it is to do and less damage is done.

Minor cracks are usually caused by settling of the home. Settling or shifting is common in newer homes and may not necessarily indicate a serious problem even in older ones. They are often the result of the underlying shifting of the soil or hydrostatic pressure against the basement walls. Large cracks, especially those radiating from the corners of windows and doors or horizontal cracks in basements walls, warrant further investigation, however.

Hairline cracks often occur in the top coat of plaster. They are usually seasonal in nature. Hot/cold or wet/dry cycles are the usual causes. These cycles force the materials in a home to expand and contract at different rates. You can't do much to totally eliminate these cracks, but flexible fiberglass tape helps prevent future cracks.

Severe water damage can cause not only the surface to fail, but the supporting and structural members as well. Brown stains, powdery residue or extensive bulges indicate a plumbing or roofing leak. You must find and repair the leak before making any other repairs.

Walls and ceilings that are water stained, but still in good condition, should be sealed with a primer/sealer before painting. Sealing will prevent the stain from bleeding through the new paint.

Plaster Repair

Plaster is brittle and flakes easily, so a small dent can easily and rather quickly become a large hole. Along with aging, impact damage is a common cause of plaster problems.

When repairing plaster, first scrape away any loose material

to expose sound plaster or the supporting lath. Fully coat the edges of the old plaster with a latex bonding liquid to give the new plaster something to bond to. Fasten a wire mesh to the lath and fill the damaged area with patching plaster. Cover the seams with fiberglass tape and apply two or three coats of drywall joint compound to blend the patch in with the surrounding area. Small holes can be normally filled with a spackling compound.

Drywall Repair

Cracks and small holes in drywall can be repaired in the same way as those in plaster. When the hole in drywall is a little larger, you may have to prepare a backing for the repair.

To prepare a backing for the hole, coat the perimeter of

a wire mesh or pegboard with joint compound. Then thread a thin wire between two of the holes. Insert the backing and keep it tight against the hole by twisting the wire around a pencil which bridges the opening. Remove the pencil and wire when the joint compound is dry. After this, patch and fill the remaining space.

Wallpaper Repair

One common problem with wallpaper is that the seams sometimes work loose. This is fairly easy to fix. Purchase a glue with a tapered nozzle at the end specifically for re-gluing wallpaper. Lift up the edge of the wallcovering and squirt a little adhesive under it. Wipe away any excess glue with a damp sponge. Then, using a seam roller, smooth the seam down.

