

SCE's notes on Shrink / Swell Soils & Rising Damp

In many parts of Australia, the shrink / swell soils can significantly affect and damage building and other structures, with the damage usually being the result of moisture changes within the clay soils underneath the building or other structure.

Shrink / swell soils [which are also termed 'reactive' soils], are the result of the soil having particles within it that expand and contract with variations in moisture content.

Whilst current Codes of Practice for construction in areas where shrink / swell soils exist usually prevent damage to structures built in accordance with these Codes of Practice, many older buildings are often severely affected & damaged by movement of a shrink / swell soil.

In addition, as many persons & builders attempt to rectify dampness problems in houses [including rising damp in walls] by providing increased ventilation in the subfloor area of the house, such work can cause serious cracking and other damage to the building structure. Inappropriate landscaping and trees can also cause extensive damage to buildings in areas of shrink / swell soils.

Some examples of the situations that are affected by shrink / swell soils include:

- Cracking of buildings & residential structures;
- Cracking & movement of the building following the provision of increased ventilation to the subfloor area;
- Cracking & damage to a building following renovations;
- Buildings experiencing rising damp.

It is also SCE's experience that:

1. Attempts to control & rectify building movements in the shrink / swell soil areas by underpinning are rarely successful and usually lead to other long-term problems.
2. The correction of rising damp issues associated with buildings requires an extensive understanding of the overall problem, with the rectification of rising damp seldom being a 'building' problem alone.

If this information relates the type of specialist advice that you need, please [Contact Us](#) or call our office on (02) 9449 5577.