OTTAWA WATERPROOFING PRO

Dampproofing vs Waterproofing

What Ontario's Building Code requires on a foundation wall: dampproofing, waterproofing where hydrostatic pressure occurs, parging and membranes

4 Expert Answers from Waterproofing IQ

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Q1

Does Ontario's Code require dampproofing under a basement slab?

Yes, with three exceptions. Ontario's Building Code says floors-on-ground shall be dampproofed (9.13.2.1). The exceptions are floors in garages, floors in unenclosed portions of buildings, and floors installed over granular fill that meets 9.16.2.1, which is the layer of at least 100 mm of coarse clean granular material under a floor-on-ground.

Where dampproofing is installed below the floor, the Code lists what it can be (9.13.2.6): polyethylene at least 0.15 mm thick with joints lapped at least 100 mm, Type S roll roofing with joints lapped at least 100 mm, or rigid polystyrene with sealed or shiplapped joints that is strong enough to support the floor and meets the Code's vapour permeance rule.

Waterproofing is a different step. Where hydrostatic pressure occurs, waterproofing is required (9.13.3.1). A basement floor that is waterproofed has a membrane between 2 layers of concrete, each at least 75 mm thick, continuous with the wall membrane (9.13.3.5). The Code gives no number or test for when hydrostatic pressure occurs, so ask the contractor which protection their quote covers for the floor and the walls, and why.

The walls have their own rule: exterior dampproofing runs from finished ground level to the top of the footing where the ground outside is higher than the floor inside (9.13.2.1, 9.13.2.4), unless the walls are waterproofed.

For an existing slab, ask the contractor to say in writing what is under it now, if they can find out, and what the quote does about it. If the job is a new slab or a slab being replaced, ask which of the Code's under-floor options the quote uses, and whether the granular layer is part of the scope.

Before you sign, have the quote name the floor protection, the wall protection, and how the two meet.

Q2

Does a waterproofed Ottawa wall also need dampproofing?

No. Ontario's Building Code states that dampproofing is not required where the wall is waterproofed. The two are alternatives, not layers stacked on top of each other.

The distinction matters because the Code sets different thresholds for each. Dampproofing is required under clause 9.13.2.1 where finished ground outside sits higher than the ground level inside the foundation walls. Waterproofing is required under clause 9.13.3.1 where hydrostatic pressure occurs. The Code gives no number or test for when hydrostatic pressure occurs, so that determination belongs to the contractor who looks at the site, not to the Code itself.

Where waterproofing is used, clause 9.13.3.4 says it must be continuous across joints and at junctions, and protected from damage during backfilling. For a masonry block wall, clause 9.13.3.3 requires at least 6 mm of mortar parging on the exterior face below ground, coved over the footing, before the waterproofing goes on. For a poured concrete wall, holes and recesses are sealed first.

One thing waterproofing does not replace is the drainage at the bottom of the wall. Clause 9.14.2.1 requires drainage at the bottom of every foundation wall that encloses the building interior, unless it can be shown to be unnecessary. That requirement stands whether the wall is dampproofed or waterproofed. What waterproofing does remove is the drainage layer against the outside face of the wall, which the Code calls for only where foundation-wall insulation extends more than 900 mm below grade; it is a separate element from the drain tile at the footing.

When you are getting a quote for exterior work, ask the contractor to name in writing whether the scope is dampproofing or waterproofing, which clause of the Building Code applies to your wall, whether the drain tile is being replaced and where it discharges, and how the membrane is protected before backfill goes in.

To hear from Ottawa contractors directly, use the request form on this site, which sends your details to local waterproofing contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Q3

Must a block foundation in Ottawa be parged before a membrane goes on?

Yes. Ontario's Building Code requires at least 6 mm of mortar parging on the exterior face of a masonry wall below ground, coved over the footing, before dampproofing or waterproofing is applied (clauses 9.13.2.3 and 9.13.3.3). That requirement applies to block foundations specifically; poured concrete walls have a different rule, which is that holes and recesses must be sealed before the membrane goes on.

Waterproofing must also be continuous across joints and at junctions between building elements, and protected from damage during backfilling (9.13.3.4).

The Code distinguishes dampproofing from waterproofing at clause 9.13.3.1: waterproofing is required where hydrostatic pressure occurs, and dampproofing is required where the finished ground outside is higher than the ground level inside the foundation walls (9.13.2.1). The Code gives no number or test for when hydrostatic pressure occurs, so the contractor inspecting your foundation is the one who should tell you which the quote covers and why. Both require the parging step on a block wall.

A couple of things worth confirming with any contractor quoting this work: ask whether the parging is included in the scope and what thickness they will apply, ask how the cove at the footing is formed and what material is used, and

ask whether the membrane is described in the written quote as dampproofing or waterproofing. Those are not interchangeable, and the quote should name which one is being installed.

Line the written quotes up and check that each one names the same wall faces and their lengths, states plainly whether the work is dampproofing or waterproofing, and says whether the drain tile is being replaced and where it will discharge.

Q4

Can waterproofing replace the drainage layer on an Ottawa foundation?

In one specific sense, yes. Ontario's Building Code calls for a drainage layer only where foundation-wall insulation extends more than 900 mm below the ground outside, and says that layer is not required where the wall is waterproofed. But the drainage layer is not the drain tile, and the wall still needs drainage at its base whether or not it is waterproofed.

What the drainage layer is

The drainage layer (9.14.2.1) is a layer against the outside of the foundation wall, such as mineral fibre insulation or free-draining granular material. The Code calls for it where foundation-wall insulation extends more than 900 mm below the ground outside. Where the wall is waterproofed, that layer is not required.

Separately, the Code requires drainage at the bottom of every foundation wall that contains the building interior, unless it can be shown to be unnecessary (9.14.2.1). That is the drain tile: at least 100 mm in diameter, its top below the bottom of the floor slab, covered on the top and sides with at least 150 mm of crushed stone or other clean coarse granular material (9.14.3.2, 9.14.3.3). Waterproofing the wall leaves that requirement in place.

Waterproofing itself is required where hydrostatic pressure occurs (9.13.3.1), and the Code gives no number for that. It must be continuous across joints and at junctions, and protected from damage during backfilling (9.13.3.4). Block walls get at least 6 mm of mortar parging coved over the footing first (9.13.3.3).

If a quote leaves out a drainage layer because the wall is being waterproofed, ask the contractor to put in writing:

- that the wall is being waterproofed, not dampproofed
- what happens to the drain tile at the footing, and where it drains
- how the membrane is protected during backfill

The one question to ask before signing is whether the quote names waterproofing or dampproofing, because only waterproofing removes the drainage-layer requirement.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Waterproofing Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any waterproofing or foundation project. Some of this work needs a City building permit, and a free locate request is required before any digging. Information is current as of November 8, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawawaterproofingpro.com** for the latest answers.