

The spooky sounds homes makes!

Should you be worried?



If you hear popping, creaking, banging, scratching or other eerie noises, it *almost* certainly isn't a helpful carpenter ghost fixing things

around your house—for better or worse. Houses are made up of a combination of wood, glass, plastics, metal, concrete and other materials that contract and expand throughout the day, all at different rates. This 'adjusting' is the typical explanation for causing those and the other strange sounds that might surprise you when you least expect it. So if you're hearing ghostly footsteps across the floor followed by invisible children's laughter, call Ghostbusters! For all other persistent noises that cause you concern, consider calling in a licensed contractor or engineer and get a professional opinion for your own peace of mind. But if you'd like to start an investigation of your own first, below are some of the most common mysterious home noises and some probable causes...

House Settling & Adjustments...

Whether your house was built recently or if it is very old, it goes through a process known as settling. These are minor adjustments that the house makes as it re-adjusts (settles) to the changing shape of the ground under the foundation. The settlement may never completely end, and the occasional pop caused by stress or movement on joists, joints, trusses, and the various components of the house are completely normal. But if major cracks develop on the ceiling or walls (especially around windows and doors), it could be an indication of something more serious, and you may need to consider a structural engineer or qualified contractor to inspect the cause.



- Temperature and humidity changes: as the temperature and humidity outside (and inside) your house fluctuate, the materials used to build your house expand and contract correspondingly. Often this expansion/contraction or 'flexing' causes popping sounds in the wood or other materials. These sounds are also normal and usually don't indicate a major problem. It's more prevalent at night because the house is rapidly cooling in the absence of the sun, and the house is quieter as people sleep. Especially susceptible are structures attached to the house that are more drastically affected by the temperature and humidity changes than the components they're attached to. Examples include: decks, cantilevered portions or additions of a home (cold air under the floor space), under-insulated crawlspace areas or basements.
- Overhead 'banging': in new homes, roof trusses or rafters (wood used to frame the attic) often is *green*, meaning it still has a high moisture content. While drying they shift and contract, triggering loud bangs. Those noises should decrease over first year or so. In older-home attics, unsettling bangs are more likely to be the sounds of trusses, joists, rafters and sheathing expanding or contracting as the roof heats up or cools down. Metal roofs are major offenders, but shingled roofs can also be noisy. Inadequate venting may be partly to blame as well. Adequate airflow/ventilation allows the interior of the attic to cool at the same rate as the outside temperature, which decreases abrupt wood movement.



Furnace, AC, Ductwork noise...

- Booming sounds coming out of a gas furnace or boiler can happen when the burners are not lighting properly. Gas can build up in the combustion chamber and the delayed ignition causes a small exploding (popping) sound. This may get worse, and possibly cause larger more dangerous explosions over time, so call in a pro to handle this problem.
- If your furnace filter or air exchanger filter isn't replaced or cleaned regularly, it can get plugged with dirt and dust and cause noises like banging, whistling, whining, or sucking sounds.
- Popping noises that sound like they are coming from inside the walls may actually be the air ducts. The popping can be rather loud as warm air expands or cool air shrinks the metal ductwork. You can try placing rubber pads between the metal ducts and wood framing to help quiet or eliminate the popping noise.
- An air conditioner unit in need of maintenance or service can make a lot of very scary sounds.



Water lines popping, banging, clanging, rubbing...

- Hot water flowing through cold copper lines can result in expansion popping.
- If your pipes bang, shudder, or clank after turning off a faucet, the problem could be *water hammer*. Water hammer is triggered by high water pressure that surges when a valve closes quickly. The pipes react by clunking against wood framing or other pipes. If you can reach the pipes, covering them in foam tubing can make a big difference. You can also try turning off the water at the main, then draining all the lines. This often "resets" the water in the pipes, thus eliminating the hammering. Your plumber can install *water hammer arresters* on water-supply lines to help maintain steady water pressure.

Scratching sounds coming from attic, walls...



- Sounds of scratching, digging, pecking, chittering, etc., coming from places where no one lives in the house could mean mice, squirrels, raccoons, birds, or even bats have made their way inside. Critters and their droppings can carry disease and cause damage to your home, tear up insulation to nest, or chew electrical wires which can cause fires. As soon as you suspect an intruder, get on it: set traps or call an animal-removal service. Prevent the problem from recurring by sealing up all the possible entrances into the home.
- To keep raccoons and squirrels away bring pet food inside. Make sure vents and chimneys are covered, but with an open mesh or a grille so those spaces can still breathe.

Appliances...

- A gas water heater bubbling or crackling is caused by sediment boiling, and is a sign that the tank may be facing premature failure. A gas-fired hot water heater works much like a boiling pot of water: a fire is lit and the water inside is heated until it's ready for use. A lot of sediment builds up at the bottom of a hot water tank and that sediment works like an insulator forcing the burner to work harder. *The Solution:* flush out your hot water tank every few months using the drain valve near the bottom.
- If your refrigerator compressor is going bad it can make a lot of very loud unsettling sounds.
- And don't forget about all the other appliances that move water and fans that move air around in your home. Regular maintenance of your washer, dryer, and anything with filters, motors, or moving parts will help reduce noises and can help extend the life of your appliances!