

TORONTO PARGING

Caulking & Sealing

Exterior caulking around windows, doors, expansion joints, and wall penetrations to prevent water and air infiltration in masonry and parging surfaces

17 Expert Answers from Parging IQ

torontoparging.com/construction-brain

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Can a mouse get through a Toronto parging gap?

Yes, a mouse can absolutely get through a gap in your foundation parging — and in the GTA, deteriorating parge coats are one of the most common entry points for rodents into Toronto homes.

A mouse can squeeze through any opening larger than 6-7 millimetres — roughly the diameter of a pencil. Gaps in parging that seem cosmetically minor are often more than large enough. A crack that starts as a hairline fracture in October can be 10-15mm wide by March after a GTA winter's worth of freeze-thaw cycling has worked on it. What looks like a surface blemish from the outside may be a full gap through to the block or rubble stone foundation beneath, especially in older Toronto homes where the original parging is 50-80 years old and the substrate behind it has its own cracks and voids.

The most vulnerable spots are where parging meets the sill plate (the wood framing sitting on top of the foundation wall), around utility penetrations (gas lines, electrical conduit, water service entries), and at the base of the foundation where parging meets the footing. These transition zones are where parging most commonly cracks, separates, or was never fully sealed to begin with. In Toronto's older housing stock — think pre-war homes in the Annex, East York, Riverdale, or Scarborough — rubble stone foundations often have gaps and voids behind failing parging that create a network of entry points.

From a pest control standpoint, the fix is a two-step process. First, seal any active gaps immediately using a combination of **steel wool packed into the void** (mice cannot chew through it) and **polyurethane caulk or hydraulic cement** applied over top. This is a temporary measure. Second, properly repair the parging to eliminate the gap permanently. A polymer-modified parge coat applied correctly over a bonded, solid substrate will seal the foundation surface and eliminate the entry points that rodents exploit.

The important caveat is that parging alone is not a pest-proof barrier if the underlying substrate has voids. Before re-parging, probe any suspicious areas with a screwdriver — if the parging sounds hollow when tapped or the screwdriver punches through easily, there are voids behind the surface that need to be filled before the new parge coat goes on. On rubble stone or deteriorated concrete block foundations, this may mean packing mortar into voids before applying the finish coat.

For a permanent repair, budget **\$500-\$2,000 for spot parging repairs** on a typical GTA home, or \$2,500-\$6,000 if the foundation needs a full re-parge. It is worth addressing properly — a failed parge coat that lets in mice is also letting in moisture, and moisture damage to a Toronto foundation compounds every winter.

If you are dealing with an active rodent problem alongside the parging damage, coordinate the parging repair with a licensed pest control professional. Sealing entry points while mice are still inside creates a different problem. A pest

professional can advise on timing the seal-up correctly.

Need help finding a parging contractor to assess and repair your foundation? Toronto Parging can match you with a local professional for a free estimate.

Q2

Can I use spray-applied sealant to coat the entire exterior of my parged foundation in one application?

Spray-applied sealant can be used on parged foundations, but it is not a one-step waterproofing solution — it is a water repellent treatment, and its effectiveness depends heavily on the condition of your parging and what you are trying to achieve.

Penetrating silane or siloxane-based sealers are the most appropriate spray-applied products for parged foundation walls in the GTA. These products soak into the pore structure of the cement matrix and chemically bond to the concrete, causing water to bead off the surface rather than absorb in. A quality penetrating sealer applied to sound, fully cured parging can reduce moisture absorption by 80-90%, significantly slowing the freeze-thaw deterioration cycle that destroys GTA foundations. Coverage rates are typically 150-250 square feet per litre depending on the porosity of your parging, and a single spray application is generally sufficient for penetrating sealers — they are designed to soak in, not build up in layers.

The critical word in your question is "coat." If you are thinking of a film-forming product — spray-applied elastomeric coating, rubber paint, or waterproofing membrane — these are different animals entirely. Film-forming coatings trap moisture vapour that migrates through the foundation wall from the interior, which causes bubbling, delamination, and in severe cases, spalling of the parging beneath. Below-grade sections of your foundation wall need to breathe from the exterior. A penetrating sealer allows vapour transmission while repelling liquid water; a thick spray-applied coating does not. For below-grade sections, exterior waterproofing membrane (applied during excavation) is the correct solution — no spray-applied surface product replaces that.

Condition of the Parging Matters Enormously

Before any sealer goes on, your parging must be structurally sound, fully cured (minimum 28 days for new parging), clean, and dry. Spray-applied sealer applied over hollow-sounding, cracked, or delaminating parging is money wasted — the sealer cannot compensate for a failing substrate, and it may actually seal moisture inside deteriorating sections, accelerating freeze-thaw damage from within. Tap the entire surface with a rubber mallet before sealing. Any sections that sound hollow must be repaired first. Cracks wider than 2mm should be filled with

an elastomeric sealant and allowed to cure before the sealer is applied over top.

GTA-Specific Timing and Application

In the GTA, apply penetrating sealer between May and September when surface temperatures are consistently above 10 degrees Celsius and no rain is forecast for 24-48 hours after application. The wall surface must be dry — not just visually dry, but dry through the first few millimetres of the parging. Applying sealer to a damp wall prevents proper penetration. A quality silane-siloxane sealer (look for products with CCMC evaluation numbers for Canadian climate performance) will last 5-10 years on a GTA foundation before reapplication is needed. Budget \$3-\$7 per square foot for professionally applied penetrating sealer, or \$50-\$150 in materials for a DIY application on a typical foundation perimeter.

Spray application is perfectly appropriate for penetrating sealers — a pump garden sprayer works fine for DIY, and professionals use airless sprayers for efficiency. Apply generously until the surface is wet and slightly runny, allow 5-10 minutes for absorption, then apply a second pass before the first has fully dried (wet-on-wet technique). Do not back-roll or brush — let it penetrate naturally.

If your goal is genuine waterproofing rather than water repellency, no spray-applied exterior surface product achieves that below grade. That requires excavation, membrane application, and dimpled drainage board — a \$3,000-\$12,000 project depending on your foundation perimeter and depth. If you are unsure whether your foundation needs sealing, repair, or full waterproofing, a parging contractor assessment is the right starting point. Toronto Parging can match you with a local masonry professional for a free estimate through the Toronto Construction Network.

Q3

Can I seal the gap between my parging and the vinyl J-channel with foam backer rod and caulk?

Yes — foam backer rod and polyurethane caulk is exactly the right approach for sealing the gap between parging and vinyl J-channel, and it's one of the few foundation maintenance tasks a capable homeowner can handle confidently.

That gap is one of the most common water entry points on GTA homes with vinyl siding. The J-channel sits at the base of the siding system and terminates right where the parging begins — and because vinyl expands and contracts significantly with temperature changes (vinyl moves more than almost any other cladding material), a rigid fill like caulk alone will crack within a season or two. The backer rod and caulk combination solves this by giving the

joint the flexibility it needs to survive GTA temperature swings.

How to do it properly. Clean the joint thoroughly first — remove any old caulk, debris, dirt, and efflorescence with a stiff brush. The joint needs to be dry and above 5 degrees Celsius to apply caulk (check both day and night temperatures). Size your backer rod to be about 25% wider than the gap so it compresses slightly and stays in place — for most J-channel gaps you'll be looking at 6mm to 12mm round backer rod. Press it into the joint to a depth that leaves 6-8mm of space above it for the caulk. This depth control is important: caulk performs best when it's wider than it is deep, which the backer rod ensures.

For caulk selection, use a **paintable polyurethane sealant** (not silicone, not standard latex). Polyurethane bonds aggressively to both the cement parging and the vinyl J-channel, remains flexible through freeze-thaw cycling, and can be painted to match. Brands like Sikaflex 1a, Tremco Dymonic, or NPC Solar Seal are all well-suited to this application. Apply in a smooth, continuous bead and tool it slightly concave so water sheds away from the joint rather than pooling in it.

GTA-specific considerations. This joint is particularly vulnerable here because vinyl J-channel moves dramatically — vinyl expands roughly 6mm per 3 metres of length between a January cold snap and a July heat wave. That movement shears rigid caulk apart. Polyurethane sealant with a backer rod backing can accommodate that movement without failing. Homes along the lakeshore (Beaches, Mimico, Port Credit, Lakeshore) see additional moisture stress at this joint due to higher ambient humidity, so don't skip the backer rod thinking caulk alone will hold.

Practical tips. Budget \$20-\$40 for materials (one tube of polyurethane caulk, a length of backer rod, a caulking gun if you don't own one). Plan for mid-spring through early fall application — October is your last realistic window in the GTA before overnight temperatures make caulk application unreliable. Inspect this joint every fall as part of your pre-winter foundation check, and re-caulk any sections that show cracking or separation before freeze-thaw season begins. A failed joint here lets water track directly behind the siding and down onto the top of the parging, which is a leading cause of parging delamination at the top edge.

If the gap is wider than 20mm, or if you're seeing water staining, efflorescence, or parging damage below the J-channel, that's worth having a masonry contractor look at — the issue may be more than just a sealant gap. Toronto Parging can match you with a local parging professional for a free assessment if you want a second set of eyes on it.

What's the best sealant for the joint between a chimney and the adjacent brick wall on a Toronto home?

The best sealant for chimney-to-wall joints in Toronto is a high-grade polyurethane masonry sealant or elastomeric caulk specifically designed for masonry applications. These materials provide the flexibility needed to handle Toronto's extreme temperature swings while maintaining a weatherproof seal.

For GTA homes, **polyurethane masonry sealants** like Sikaflex Construction Sealant or Tremco Dymonic 100 are the gold standard. These sealants remain flexible from -40°C to +80°C, which is essential given Toronto's temperature range from -20°C winters to +35°C summers. The constant expansion and contraction of brick and mortar joints throughout our 50+ annual freeze-thaw cycles will crack rigid sealants within one winter season.

Elastomeric sealants are another excellent choice, particularly acrylic-elastomeric formulations that can bridge cracks up to 3mm and expand/contract by 25% without losing adhesion. These work especially well on heritage Toronto homes where the chimney and adjacent wall may have different rates of thermal movement due to age differences or different masonry materials.

GTA-specific considerations make sealant choice critical. Lake Ontario's humidity effect means homes within 5 kilometres of the lake (Beaches, Mimico, Port Credit areas) need sealants with superior moisture resistance. The urban heat island effect in downtown Toronto means south and west-facing chimney joints can reach surface temperatures 15-20 degrees higher than ambient, requiring sealants rated for high-temperature performance.

Application technique matters as much as material choice. Clean out all old, loose sealant and debris from the joint using a wire brush or oscillating tool. The joint should be dry but not dusty - lightly mist if needed. Insert closed-cell backer rod to create the proper sealant depth (typically 6-13mm deep, with sealant width 2-3 times the depth). Apply sealant in one continuous bead and tool smooth within 10 minutes. Avoid sealant application when temperatures are below 5°C or above 30°C, or when rain is expected within 24 hours.

Cost expectations for quality masonry sealants run \$15-30 per tube, with each tube covering approximately 7-10 linear metres depending on joint size. Professional application typically costs \$8-15 per linear metre including material, surface prep, and cleanup.

When to hire a professional: Chimney work involves height and safety considerations that make professional application worthwhile for most homeowners. Masons have the proper staging or scaffolding, experience with joint preparation, and access to commercial-grade sealants. If the chimney shows signs of structural movement (step cracks, separation from the wall, loose bricks), have a mason assess the situation before any sealant work - these issues require repointing or structural repair, not just sealing.

Need help finding a masonry contractor experienced with chimney work? Toronto Parging can match you with local professionals who understand GTA climate challenges and proper chimney maintenance techniques.

Q5

What's the best way to seal a cold joint in parging that developed where work stopped between days?

Cold joints in parging occur when fresh material is applied against previously cured parging, creating a visible seam and potential weak point that's prone to water infiltration and freeze-thaw damage in the GTA's harsh climate.

A cold joint forms when parging work stops partway through a wall and resumes the next day or later. The cured edge of the previous day's work creates a distinct boundary where the new material meets the old. Without proper preparation, this junction becomes a water entry point that can lead to delamination, cracking, and premature failure during Toronto's 50+ annual freeze-thaw cycles.

Proper cold joint preparation is essential for a durable repair. First, dampen the cured edge of the existing parging — it should be moist but not soaking wet. Apply a fresh coat of concrete bonding agent (SBR latex or acrylic-based) to the dampened surface, working it well into the texture of the cured parging. The bonding agent creates a chemical bridge between the old and new material, preventing the cold joint from becoming a failure point.

Feathering technique is critical for blending the new work seamlessly. When applying fresh parging against the prepared cold joint, work the new material slightly over the bonding agent-treated edge, then feather it back with your trowel to create a gradual transition rather than an abrupt edge. This overlapping technique eliminates the visible seam and creates a stronger mechanical bond. The key is maintaining consistent thickness — avoid creating a thick buildup at the joint that will cure differently than the surrounding parging.

GTA climate considerations make cold joint sealing particularly important. Temperature cycling causes differential expansion between materials of different ages and compositions. A poorly sealed cold joint acts like a stress concentrator, directing freeze-thaw forces into the weakest point of the repair. In Toronto's clay soil conditions, where foundation movement is common, cold joints are often the first place parging cracks appear.

Curing management at cold joints requires extra attention. Keep the repaired area moist for 3-5 days, paying special attention to the joint area which may dry faster than the surrounding material. In GTA summer heat, mist the area 2-3 times daily and consider covering with damp burlap if temperatures exceed 30°C. The joint area must cure

at the same rate as the surrounding parging to prevent differential shrinkage cracking.

When to hire a professional: While small cold joint repairs (under 2 square feet) can be DIY projects using pre-mixed polymer parging compound, larger repairs or multiple cold joints across a foundation wall indicate the original parging job was poorly planned or executed. Professional masons plan their work to minimize cold joints and have the experience to properly prepare and seal unavoidable joints. If you're seeing multiple cold joint failures, the entire parge coat may need professional assessment and possible replacement.

For best results, use polymer-modified parging compound for cold joint repairs — the enhanced flexibility and adhesion properties perform better than traditional Portland cement mixes in Toronto's freeze-thaw conditions, and the pre-mixed formulation eliminates mix ratio errors that can weaken the repair.

Q6

How often should the caulking around basement window inserts be replaced on a home in the GTA?

Basement window caulking in the GTA should be inspected annually and typically needs replacement every 3-5 years, though this varies significantly based on exposure, caulk quality, and installation technique. The harsh freeze-thaw cycling, temperature extremes, and moisture conditions in the Greater Toronto Area are particularly hard on exterior caulking.

GTA Climate Impact on Window Caulking

Toronto's climate creates the perfect storm for caulk failure around basement windows. The region's 50+ freeze-thaw cycles per winter cause caulk to expand and contract repeatedly, gradually breaking down the polymer chains that give caulk its flexibility. Basement windows are especially vulnerable because they're often partially below grade, where moisture levels stay higher and freeze-thaw cycles are more frequent. The temperature differential between winter lows of -20°C and summer highs exceeding 35°C means your window caulking experiences a 55-degree range that stresses even high-quality polyurethane caulks.

Window wells compound the problem by collecting water, leaves, and debris that stay in contact with the caulk joints for extended periods. Ice buildup in window wells during winter creates mechanical pressure that can physically tear caulk away from the window frame or foundation. Homes in lakefront neighbourhoods (Beaches, Mimico, Port Credit) often see caulk deterioration 20-30% faster due to higher humidity levels from Lake Ontario.

Signs It's Time to Replace Window Caulking

Inspect your basement window caulking every spring after the last frost. Look for **cracking** — hairline cracks allow water penetration that will worsen rapidly through the next winter. **Shrinkage** where the caulk has pulled away from either the window frame or the foundation creates gaps that let water directly into the basement. **Hardening** — if the caulk feels rigid rather than flexible when pressed with your finger, it has lost its elasticity and will crack under thermal movement. **Discoloration or mold growth** indicates moisture has been penetrating the joint for some time.

Material Selection for GTA Conditions

Use **polyurethane caulk** for basement window applications in the GTA — it offers the best combination of flexibility, adhesion to masonry and metal, and freeze-thaw resistance. Brands like Sikaflex, Tremco, or DAP Dynaflex perform well in Toronto conditions. Avoid basic acrylic or latex caulks, which become brittle in cold weather and fail within 1-2 winters. Silicone caulk is highly flexible but doesn't adhere well to masonry and can't be painted, making it less suitable for foundation applications.

For window wells that collect significant water or ice, consider **elastomeric sealant** — it's more expensive (\$15-30 per tube versus \$8-15 for polyurethane) but can bridge larger gaps and handle more movement. Apply caulk when temperatures are consistently above 10°C and won't drop below 5°C for 24 hours after application.

Professional Installation vs DIY

Most homeowners can handle basement window caulking as a DIY project. Clean out all old caulk with a utility knife or caulk removal tool, ensure surfaces are dry, and apply new caulk in one smooth bead, tooling it immediately for proper adhesion. However, **hire a professional** if you discover the window frame is loose, if there are gaps larger than 10mm, or if water damage is visible around the window opening — these indicate structural issues that require proper assessment and repair before caulking.

Cost and Timing

Expect to pay \$5-15 per linear foot for professional window caulking, or budget \$50-150 in materials to caulk all basement windows yourself. The best time for caulking in the GTA is late spring through early fall when temperatures are stable. Avoid caulking during the peak summer heat (above 30°C) as the caulk can skin over too quickly, preventing proper adhesion.

Need help finding a contractor for window well repairs or basement waterproofing? Toronto Parging can match you with local professionals through the Toronto Construction Network.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Toronto Construction Network connects homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Kitchen Land
- Leveloff.LTD
- The English Carpenter
- yourCloset.ca
- Metro Rent-All

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What's the best type of caulking for sealing foundation cracks before winter in Toronto?

Polyurethane caulking is the best choice for sealing foundation cracks before a GTA winter, outperforming silicone and acrylic options in adhesion, flexibility, and durability on masonry surfaces. A quality polyurethane sealant like Sikaflex or Dymonic bonds aggressively to concrete, poured foundations, block, and parging while remaining flexible enough to handle Toronto's extreme temperature swings from -20°C in January to 35°C in July without cracking, pulling away, or hardening.

The timing of your repair matters enormously. **Caulking must be applied when temperatures are above 5°C** and the surface is dry — once overnight temperatures are consistently dropping below freezing, the window has closed. In the GTA, your practical fall deadline for caulking work is typically mid-to-late October, though some years give you until early November. The caulking needs at least 24-48 hours above 5°C to cure properly. Applying caulk to a cold or damp surface prevents adhesion, and the sealant will peel away during the first thaw cycle.

For hairline to moderate cracks (up to about 6mm wide), clean the crack thoroughly with a wire brush to remove loose material, dust, and any old failed caulking. For cracks deeper than 12mm, insert a closed-cell foam backer rod into the crack first — this controls the depth of the sealant and creates the ideal sealant profile where the width of the sealant bead is roughly twice its depth. This profile allows the caulking to stretch and compress with thermal movement without tearing. Apply the polyurethane caulking with a caulking gun, pushing the material into the crack rather than dragging it across the surface, and tool it smooth with a wet finger or plastic spoon within 10-15 minutes before it skins over. GTA pricing for polyurethane caulk is **\$8-\$15 per tube**, and professional exterior foundation caulking for a typical home runs **\$300-\$1,500** depending on the extent of work.

What about silicone? Silicone caulking is waterproof and extremely flexible, but it does not adhere well to porous masonry surfaces — it works best on smooth, non-porous materials like glass and metal. More importantly, silicone cannot be painted, so if you plan to paint or parge over the repair, silicone will prevent adhesion. Acrylic latex caulking is paintable and easy to work with but lacks the flexibility and longevity needed for GTA foundation cracks — it hardens over time and cracks within 2-3 freeze-thaw seasons.

For cracks wider than 6mm or cracks that are actively leaking water, caulking is not the right solution. Wide or wet cracks in poured concrete foundations should be professionally injected with polyurethane foam, which fills the crack through the full wall thickness at **\$300-\$800 per crack**. Cracks wider than 5mm, step cracks in block or brick foundations, and horizontal cracks may indicate structural movement that requires professional assessment before any sealing — covering these with caulk hides the problem while the damage continues.

A practical pre-winter checklist for GTA homeowners: walk your foundation perimeter in early October and identify all cracks, gaps around pipes and cables, joints where foundation meets siding or brick, and any areas where old caulking has pulled away or crumbled. Clean and caulk everything above grade with polyurethane sealant while temperatures allow. This simple preventive step costs under \$100 in materials for a DIY approach and can prevent thousands in water damage over the winter. If you would prefer professional caulking or need crack injection, Toronto Parging can match you with qualified local contractors for a free estimate.

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- Norseman Construction & Development
- Stone Contractors Group Inc.
- Mason Guy
- Metro Rent-All

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Q8

How long does exterior caulking around a foundation typically last before it needs replacing?

Quality polyurethane caulking around a GTA foundation typically lasts 7-12 years before it needs replacing, while cheaper acrylic caulking may fail in as little as 3-5 years. The lifespan depends heavily on the product type, surface preparation quality, sun exposure, and the relentless freeze-thaw cycling that Toronto's climate inflicts on every exterior sealant.

The GTA is particularly demanding on caulking because of the extreme annual temperature range. Foundation caulking must survive temperatures from -20°C or colder in winter to 35°C or higher in summer — a 55-degree swing that causes continuous expansion and contraction in both the sealant and the substrates it bonds to. With over 50 freeze-thaw cycles per winter, each one stretching and compressing the sealant bead, even premium products eventually fatigue and lose elasticity. South-facing and west-facing foundation walls take the hardest hit because direct sun exposure accelerates UV degradation and creates more extreme daily temperature cycling. In downtown Toronto and dense inner suburbs, the urban heat island effect pushes surface temperatures even higher,

shortening caulking lifespan by 15-25% compared to shaded walls.

How different caulking types perform in GTA conditions: Polyurethane sealant (Sikaflex, Dymonic, PL) provides the best combination of adhesion, flexibility, and longevity on masonry — expect **8-12 years** on sheltered walls and **6-9 years** on sun-exposed walls. High-performance polyurethane products rated for +/- 50% joint movement last the longest. Silicone caulking, while extremely flexible and waterproof, does not bond reliably to porous masonry surfaces and tends to peel away from concrete and parging within 3-5 years — it is not recommended for foundation applications. Acrylic latex caulking is the most affordable option but hardens as the plasticizers evaporate, losing flexibility within **3-5 years** in GTA conditions and cracking at the bond lines. It is adequate for temporary repairs but should not be relied on for long-term foundation sealing.

Road salt significantly reduces caulking lifespan. Foundations along driveways, walkways, and streets — especially in neighbourhoods with heavy winter salting — experience chemical attack from de-icing salts splashing onto caulking and adjacent parging. Salt breaks down polyurethane and acrylic sealants faster than UV alone. If your foundation is in a splash zone, expect to replace caulking 20-30% sooner.

Signs your foundation caulking needs replacing include visible cracking or splitting along the bond line (where the caulking meets the substrate), sections pulling away from one or both surfaces, hardening or brittleness when pressed with a fingertip, visible gaps or daylight through joints, and any areas where water is getting behind the sealant. The best practice is to do a complete foundation perimeter inspection every fall — typically early October in the GTA — and replace any failing caulking before winter arrives. This is a straightforward DIY task for most homeowners: remove the old caulking with a utility knife and wire brush, clean the joint surfaces, insert backer rod in joints deeper than 12mm, and apply fresh polyurethane caulking. Materials for a full foundation re-caulk run **\$50-\$150** for a typical GTA home. Professional foundation caulking costs **\$300-\$1,500**, which is worthwhile if you have extensive joints, second-storey siding transitions, or hard-to-reach areas. Toronto Parging can connect you with local masonry professionals if you need help with foundation caulking or related work.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Toronto Construction Network connects homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Kitchen Land
- Straight Up Masonry LTD
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- Bhogal Metal
- yourCloset.ca

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Should I caulk the gap between my foundation and the concrete driveway slab to prevent water entry?

Yes, absolutely — the gap between your foundation wall and concrete driveway slab is one of the most common water entry points on GTA homes, and sealing it with proper caulking is an effective, low-cost preventive measure. This joint is technically a control joint or isolation joint — the driveway and foundation are designed to move independently — and it naturally opens and closes with seasonal temperature changes and frost heave. Without sealant, water pours directly down the face of your foundation, pooling at the footing and contributing to basement moisture, efflorescence, and long-term parging deterioration.

The GTA's heavy clay soils make this joint especially problematic. Clay holds water against the foundation for extended periods after rain or snowmelt, and the driveway slab prevents natural evaporation from the soil surface. Water that enters through the driveway-foundation gap travels straight down to the footing, where it can overwhelm weeping tile systems and cause hydrostatic pressure against the basement wall. In winter, road salt tracked onto driveways concentrates in this joint and chemically attacks both the parging and the concrete on either side. Sealing this gap is one of the simplest and most effective things you can do to reduce foundation moisture — and it costs under \$30 in materials.

The correct way to seal this joint is with a combination of backer rod and polyurethane caulking. First, clean the joint thoroughly — remove all dirt, debris, old caulking, and vegetation with a wire brush, screwdriver, or compressed air. If the gap is wider than 6mm or deeper than 12mm (which it usually is), press closed-cell foam backer rod into the joint, leaving approximately 6-10mm of depth above the backer rod for the sealant. The backer rod serves two purposes: it controls the sealant depth to create the ideal sealant profile (width roughly twice the depth), and it acts as a bond breaker on the bottom so the sealant can stretch between the two side bond surfaces without tearing. Apply a quality polyurethane sealant — self-levelling polyurethane is ideal for horizontal and near-horizontal joints like driveway slabs because it flows into the joint and levels itself for a smooth finish. Regular polyurethane caulk works fine for vertical sections. Tool the sealant smooth and ensure good contact with both the foundation and driveway surfaces. GTA pricing: backer rod runs **\$5-\$15 per package** (enough for a full driveway run), self-levelling polyurethane sealant runs **\$12-\$20 per tube**, and you will typically need 2-4 tubes depending on the driveway length and gap width.

Avoid using silicone in this joint. Silicone does not bond well to porous concrete surfaces and will peel away within a couple of seasons, particularly in the splash zone where salt and water are constantly present. Acrylic caulking is also a poor choice because the joint movement from frost heave and thermal expansion will crack rigid acrylic within one to two GTA winters.

One important caveat: if the driveway slab is sloping toward your foundation rather than away from it, caulking the joint alone will not solve your water problem. The Ontario Building Code requires finish grades to slope away from the foundation — at minimum a 6-inch drop over the first 6 feet. A driveway that directs water toward the house needs to be re-graded, mudjacked, or replaced to correct the slope. Caulking helps, but proper drainage is the primary defence. If your driveway-to-foundation gap is extensive or you are seeing water in the basement along that wall, a professional assessment is worthwhile — Toronto Parging can match you with local contractors for free estimates.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Toronto Construction Network connects homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Kitchen Land
- The Deck Store Inc
- LMP Scaffolding Services
- Youbility Inc.
- Vista Builders Ltd

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What's the best way to seal the joint where parging meets the brick veneer on my Toronto home?

The parging-to-brick veneer transition joint should be sealed with a high-quality polyurethane sealant over backer rod, creating a flexible weatherproof seal that accommodates the different thermal movement rates of parging and brick. This joint is one of the most vulnerable spots on a GTA home's exterior because parging (cementitious coating on the foundation) and brick veneer (clay masonry on the above-grade wall) expand and contract at different rates — they are different materials on different substrates, often meeting at or near grade level where water, ice, and road salt exposure are at their worst.

In Toronto's climate, this transition point takes extraordinary abuse. Snow banks pile against it in winter, ice dams form at the base of brick walls, spring snowmelt runs directly across it, and road salt splash attacks it from November through April. The different thermal expansion coefficients of concrete parging and clay brick mean the joint is constantly moving — opening slightly in winter cold and closing in summer heat. A rigid repair like Portland cement or hydraulic cement will crack and separate within one to two freeze-thaw seasons. The joint needs a flexible sealant that maintains adhesion to both surfaces while stretching and compressing through the GTA's 55-degree annual temperature range.

Here is the proper repair method. First, remove any old, failed caulking or loose mortar from the joint using a utility knife, scraper, or oscillating tool. Clean both surfaces with a wire brush to remove dust, efflorescence, and loose material — the sealant needs clean, solid substrate on both sides. If the joint is deeper than 12mm, press closed-cell foam backer rod into the gap to control sealant depth and create the proper sealant profile. The ideal profile has the sealant width roughly twice its depth, bonding to the two side surfaces (parging face and brick face) but not to the back of the joint. This allows the sealant to stretch like a rubber band between the two surfaces without tearing.

Apply a paintable polyurethane sealant with a caulking gun, pushing the material firmly into the joint to ensure full contact with both surfaces. Tool the bead smooth with a wet finger or caulking tool within 10-15 minutes. Paintable polyurethane is important here because you will likely want the sealant to match either the parging colour or the brick mortar colour. After full cure (7-14 days for polyurethane), apply exterior masonry paint or elastomeric paint to blend the repair with the surrounding surfaces. GTA pricing for professional caulking of this transition runs **\$5-\$15 per linear foot installed**, or approximately **\$200-\$600** for the full perimeter of a typical GTA home.

One critical detail that many contractors get wrong: the parging-to-brick transition should include a small drip edge or cant detail that directs water away from the joint. If water runs down the brick face and pools at the joint, even the best caulking will eventually fail from constant moisture exposure. An experienced mason will create a

slight slope or overhang in the parging just below the brick transition so water drips clear of the joint rather than sitting on it.

Do not use silicone caulking at this location — silicone cannot be painted and does not bond reliably to porous masonry surfaces over the long term. Also avoid construction adhesive or roof sealant, which are sometimes used as shortcuts but lack the flexibility and UV resistance needed for this exposed location. This is a job most handy homeowners can tackle as a DIY project with \$30-\$50 in materials. If the joint is extensive, the parging is failing around it, or you would prefer professional work, Toronto Parging can match you with local masonry contractors through the Toronto Construction Network.

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Q11

Can I use silicone caulking on a foundation or is polyurethane a better choice for masonry?

Polyurethane is the significantly better choice for foundation and masonry applications — silicone caulking should generally be avoided on porous masonry surfaces. While silicone is excellent on non-porous materials like glass, metal, and ceramic tile, it performs poorly on the rough, porous surfaces of concrete foundations, parging, concrete block, and brick that make up GTA home foundations. The difference in long-term performance is dramatic enough that most experienced masons in the Greater Toronto Area will not use silicone on any masonry application.

The core issue is adhesion. Silicone sealants bond by creating a mechanical grip on the surface, and porous masonry surfaces are inherently challenging for this type of bond. Concrete and parging are alkaline materials that can chemically interfere with silicone cure chemistry, especially when moisture is present — and in the GTA,

moisture is almost always present at the foundation level. Within 2-4 years, silicone caulking on a GTA foundation typically begins peeling away at the bond line, especially on surfaces that experience road salt splash, freeze-thaw cycling, and spring snowmelt. Once the bond fails at any point, water gets behind the silicone bead and accelerates the failure along the entire run.

Polyurethane sealants solve all of these problems. Products like Sikaflex, Dymonic, or PL Polyurethane create a true chemical bond with porous masonry surfaces that actually gets stronger as it cures. Polyurethane maintains excellent flexibility from -30°C to 75°C, more than covering the GTA's temperature extremes. It is paintable with exterior masonry paint, which is critical for aesthetic applications on visible foundation walls. It resists UV degradation reasonably well (though it does eventually chalk in direct sun). And it is compatible with concrete, mortar, brick, stone, and parging — all the substrates you encounter on a typical GTA foundation. GTA pricing for quality polyurethane sealant is **\$8-\$15 per tube** at any hardware store, comparable to or slightly less than premium silicone.

The one scenario where silicone has an edge is in joints that will be perpetually wet or submerged — silicone cures even in the presence of moisture and remains flexible essentially forever. But foundation joints below grade should not be sealed with caulking at all; they require proper waterproofing membrane. Above grade, polyurethane wins on every metric that matters for masonry.

Here is a practical comparison for GTA homeowners:

Polyurethane vs. Silicone on Masonry

Polyurethane offers strong adhesion to porous masonry, is paintable, has a lifespan of 8-12 years on foundations, and costs \$8-\$15 per tube. Silicone offers poor adhesion to porous masonry, is not paintable, typically lasts only 3-5 years on foundations before peeling, and costs \$8-\$20 per tube. Polyurethane can be tooled and shaped for 10-15 minutes after application, while silicone skins over faster and is harder to tool neatly on rough surfaces. Polyurethane cleans up with mineral spirits; silicone requires silicone remover solvent.

One caveat with polyurethane: it is more sensitive to moisture during initial application. The joint surfaces should be clean and dry when you apply polyurethane caulking. If you are sealing foundation cracks or joints in damp conditions, use a polyurethane product specifically formulated for damp substrates, or wait for a dry spell. Application temperatures should be above 5°C for proper cure — in the GTA, this effectively limits your window to mid-April through mid-October for best results. If you have extensive foundation caulking to do or are unsure about the right product for your specific situation, Toronto Parging can connect you with qualified masonry professionals for a free assessment.

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Q12

How do I properly seal around basement window frames where they meet the parging?

Sealing the joint between basement window frames and parging requires thorough removal of old caulking, proper surface preparation, backer rod installation where needed, and application of a paintable polyurethane sealant — done correctly, this repair prevents water infiltration and drafts for 8-12 years.

Basement windows sit at or near grade level, making them one of the most water-vulnerable points on any GTA home. Snow piles against them in winter, rain splashes up from the ground, and the joint between the window frame and surrounding parging takes constant abuse from freeze-thaw cycling.

The most common failure point is not the window itself but the sealant joint where the window frame meets the parging or concrete foundation. Over time, the original caulking dries out, cracks, and separates from one or both surfaces. In the GTA, this process is accelerated by the 50-plus freeze-thaw cycles per winter — water enters the tiniest gap, freezes and expands, and progressively widens the opening. Once water gets behind the parging around a window, it causes delamination, efflorescence, and in severe cases, interior water staining and mould growth in the basement.

Step-by-step proper sealing process. Start by removing all old caulking completely — do not caulk over old caulking, as the new material will not bond properly and will peel away. Use a utility knife or oscillating multi-tool to cut out the old sealant, then clean the joint with a wire brush. Remove any loose parging, crumbling mortar, or debris from both the window frame edge and the parging surface. If the parging around the window is cracked, hollow-sounding, or delaminated, it should be chipped out and re-parged before caulking — sealing over failing parging just traps water behind it. For joints wider than 6mm or deeper than 12mm, push closed-cell foam backer

rod into the gap, leaving 6-10mm of depth for the sealant. Apply a paintable polyurethane caulking, working from the bottom of the window up each side and across the top. The bottom joint is the most critical — this is where water pools. Ensure continuous contact between the sealant, the window frame, and the parging on both sides of the joint. Tool the bead smooth with a wet finger or caulking tool, creating a slightly concave profile that sheds water rather than collecting it.

The top of the window deserves special attention. Water running down the foundation wall above the window collects at the top frame and enters through any gap. If your basement window has a concrete or metal lintel above it, check that the lintel-to-parging joint is also sealed. A small drip edge or Z-flashing above the window is ideal for directing water away from the top joint — this is inexpensive to add and dramatically reduces water exposure to the sealant.

For windows in window wells, also seal the gap between the window well and the foundation wall. Window well-to-foundation joints are often overlooked but are a major water entry path. Install a window well cover to keep rain and debris out of the well. Ensure the window well drain is clear and connected to the weeping tile system — a clogged window well fills with water during heavy rain and creates hydrostatic pressure against the basement window.

Materials for this job run \$30-\$75 for a typical GTA home with 3-6 basement windows: polyurethane caulking at \$8-\$15 per tube (usually 2-3 tubes needed), backer rod at \$5-\$15, and a utility knife or caulking removal tool. Professional sealing costs **\$15-\$30 per window** or is often included as part of a broader foundation caulking job at **\$300-\$1,500** for the full perimeter. This is a very achievable DIY project for most homeowners — the key is thorough surface preparation and using polyurethane rather than silicone. If your basement windows are leaking and you suspect the issue goes beyond caulking failure, Toronto Parging can match you with local foundation and masonry professionals through the Toronto Construction Network.

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Should the expansion joint between my foundation and garage slab be sealed with caulk or backer rod?

You need both — backer rod and caulk work together as a system, not as alternatives. The expansion joint between your foundation wall and attached garage slab is a designed movement joint that allows the two concrete elements to expand, contract, and settle independently. In the GTA, this joint undergoes significant seasonal movement due to frost heave pushing the garage slab upward in winter and thermal expansion cycling the concrete through a 55-degree annual temperature range. Sealing it properly requires backer rod to control the sealant depth, followed by a flexible caulking that can handle the movement without tearing or losing adhesion.

This joint is important to seal because it is a direct path for water, cold air, carbon monoxide (if you warm up vehicles in the garage), and insects into the living space. In GTA homes with attached garages, the foundation-to-slab joint is often the number one source of garage water infiltration during spring thaw and heavy rainstorms. Snow and ice melt that accumulates on the garage floor drains toward this low point, and without sealant, it runs directly against or under the foundation wall.

Here is the correct method. Clean the joint thoroughly — remove any old caulking, debris, road salt deposits, and loose concrete. If the joint has been filled with tar, asphalt patching, or expanding foam in the past, all of it needs to come out for a proper repair. Use a screwdriver, wire brush, or oscillating tool to get down to clean, solid concrete on both sides. Measure the joint width — typical foundation-to-slab expansion joints are 10-25mm wide. Select closed-cell foam backer rod that is approximately 25% wider than the joint so it compresses and stays in place when pushed in. Press the backer rod into the joint to a depth that leaves approximately 6-12mm of space above it for the sealant. The backer rod prevents three-sided adhesion — the sealant should bond only to the two side walls (foundation face and slab edge), not to the bottom. This two-sided bond allows the sealant to stretch like a rubber band as the joint opens and closes, rather than tearing because it is glued to three surfaces.

For the sealant, use a self-levelling polyurethane designed for concrete joints. Self-levelling formulas flow into the joint and create a smooth, flush surface that will not trap dirt or water. Standard (non-sag) polyurethane works too but requires more tooling to create a smooth finish in a horizontal joint. Apply the sealant over the backer rod, filling to within 3mm of the slab surface. Do not overfill — the sealant should be slightly recessed so vehicle tires and foot traffic do not abrade it. GTA pricing for materials: backer rod is **\$5-\$15 per package**, self-levelling polyurethane is **\$12-\$20 per tube**, and you will typically need 2-4 tubes for a single-car garage and 3-6 for a double. Total DIY cost: **\$25-\$80**.

Timing matters in the GTA. Do this work when temperatures are above 10°C and the garage slab is dry. Ideal timing is late spring or early fall when the joint is at a moderate width — neither fully expanded from summer heat

nor fully contracted from winter cold. If you seal the joint in the dead of summer when it is at its narrowest, the sealant will be compressed when the joint closes further in extreme heat and may squeeze out. If you seal it in the coldest part of winter when the joint is at its widest, the sealant may be stretched beyond its capacity when summer expansion closes the joint.

Do not use silicone, construction adhesive, or expanding foam for this joint. Silicone does not bond to porous concrete reliably. Construction adhesive is rigid and will crack. Expanding foam fills the space but has no flexibility or water resistance and crumbles under foot traffic. If your expansion joint is severely deteriorated with crumbling concrete edges, or if the garage slab has heaved significantly, professional assessment is worthwhile — the joint may need to be routed (widened with a concrete saw) to create clean, uniform edges before sealing. Toronto Parging can match you with qualified local contractors for this and other foundation work through the Toronto Construction Network.

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Q14

What kind of sealant works best for sealing cracks in a poured concrete foundation wall?

Polyurethane-based crack sealant is the best choice for sealing cracks in poured concrete foundation walls in the GTA, but the right product depends on whether the crack is actively leaking, hairline or wider, and above or below grade.

For **non-leaking hairline cracks** (under 3mm wide) on above-grade foundation walls, an elastomeric masonry sealant is the most practical option. These sealants remain flexible after curing and can expand and contract with Toronto's extreme temperature swings — critical when your foundation wall endures over 50 freeze-thaw cycles

every winter. Products like Sikaflex or Loctite PL Concrete & Masonry sealant bond well to concrete, remain flexible down to -30°C, and can bridge cracks up to 3mm. You will pay \$15–\$30 per tube at GTA building supply stores, and a single tube covers roughly 10–15 linear feet of crack depending on width and depth.

For **wider cracks** (3mm to 10mm) that are not actively leaking, a two-part polyurethane caulk applied with backer rod gives the best long-term seal. Press closed-cell backer rod into the crack to a depth roughly equal to the crack width, then apply the sealant over top. The backer rod prevents the sealant from bonding at the bottom of the crack (called a "three-sided bond"), which allows it to stretch properly as the crack moves with seasonal thermal cycling. This is especially important in the GTA where foundation walls can shift slightly between summer and winter due to clay soil expansion and contraction. Expect to spend \$8–\$15 per tube of polyurethane caulk plus \$5–\$15 for a roll of backer rod.

For **actively leaking cracks** in poured concrete, surface sealant alone will not solve the problem. The water pressure behind the wall will eventually push through or around any surface-applied product. In this case, **crack injection** is the proper repair. A professional injects either epoxy resin (for structural bonding — fills the crack solidly and restores structural integrity) or polyurethane foam (for waterproofing — expands to fill the crack and remains flexible). Epoxy injection is preferred for structural cracks and costs \$300–\$600 per crack in the GTA. Polyurethane foam injection is better for non-structural cracks where ongoing movement is expected, and runs \$300–\$800 per crack depending on length and accessibility.

Before applying any sealant, clean the crack thoroughly. Use a wire brush to remove loose concrete, dust, and any old failed sealant. For best adhesion, the concrete should be clean, dry, and free of paint or coatings along the crack edges. If you are sealing a crack that has been previously repaired and failed, grind the edges back to clean concrete before resealing.

One important caution: if you see **step cracks, horizontal cracks, or any crack wider than 5mm that appears to be growing**, do not simply seal it and move on. These patterns can indicate structural foundation movement caused by GTA clay soil pressure, hydrostatic pressure, or settling. A structural crack requires professional assessment — sometimes carbon fibre straps, wall anchors, or even underpinning are needed. Sealing a structural crack with caulk hides the problem and allows it to worsen unseen, potentially turning a \$2,000 repair into a \$20,000 foundation stabilization project.

For most homeowners dealing with typical hairline settling cracks on above-grade foundation walls, applying a quality elastomeric sealant is a straightforward DIY project. Clean the crack, apply the sealant with a caulking gun, tool it smooth with a wet finger or plastic spoon, and allow 24–48 hours to cure before painting. If the crack is below grade or actively leaking, bring in a professional for proper crack injection — it is one of the most cost-effective foundation repairs available in the GTA market.

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Q15

Is it worth sealing the entire parging surface with a clear waterproof sealant every few years?

Yes, applying a penetrating concrete sealer to your parging every 3–5 years is one of the most cost-effective ways to extend its lifespan in the GTA, particularly if your foundation is exposed to road salt, lake-effect humidity, or heavy rain splash-back from hard surfaces.

The key word here is **penetrating** sealer, not a film-forming sealer. A penetrating silane or siloxane-based sealer soaks into the parge coat and chemically reacts with the cement to create a hydrophobic barrier within the material itself. Water beads on the surface and runs off instead of being absorbed. Critically, the parging can still breathe — moisture vapour can escape from inside the foundation wall outward, which prevents the trapped-moisture problems that destroy parging from the inside out. Film-forming sealers (the ones that leave a visible glossy or matte coating on the surface) trap moisture behind them, and in the GTA's freeze-thaw climate, that trapped water freezes, expands, and blows the sealer and the top layer of parging right off the wall.

The cost is very reasonable. A quality penetrating concrete sealer runs \$3–\$7 per square foot when professionally applied, or you can purchase the product for roughly \$40–\$80 per gallon and apply it yourself with a brush, roller, or pump sprayer. A typical GTA home with 100–200 square feet of exposed foundation parging can be sealed in an afternoon for \$80–\$160 in materials. Compare that to the \$2,500–\$6,000 cost of complete re-parging when a parge coat fails prematurely, and the value is obvious.

When sealing makes the biggest difference is on foundations exposed to salt and de-icing chemicals. Homes along busy GTA streets, homes with concrete driveways right against the foundation wall, and homes with

sidewalks adjacent to the foundation all take heavy salt exposure every winter. Salt accelerates efflorescence — those white mineral deposits you see blooming on parging and masonry — and chemically attacks Portland cement binders. A penetrating sealer dramatically reduces salt absorption and the resulting damage. If your home is in a lakefront neighbourhood like the Beaches, Mimico, Port Credit, or Burlington waterfront, the higher ambient humidity from Lake Ontario means your parging absorbs more moisture year-round, and sealing is especially worthwhile.

Application timing matters. Apply the sealer when the parging surface is clean, dry, and above 5°C with no rain forecast for 24 hours. Late spring (after the last frost) and early fall (before the first freeze) are the ideal windows in the GTA. If the parging is new, wait a full 28 days after application before sealing to allow complete curing. Clean any efflorescence, dirt, or mould from the surface with a stiff brush and masonry cleaner before applying — the sealer needs to penetrate clean pores to work properly.

Not every parging surface needs sealing. **Polymer-modified parging** already contains acrylic or latex polymers that provide significant water resistance, and sealing it provides a more modest improvement. Traditional **Portland cement parging**, which is more porous and more vulnerable to freeze-thaw damage, benefits the most from sealing. If your parging is already cracked, delaminated, or failing, sealing it will not fix those problems — you need repair or re-parging first, then seal the new surface.

As a practical maintenance schedule, inspect your parging every spring after the freeze-thaw season, clean any efflorescence or staining, and reseal every 3–5 years. This simple routine can extend the life of a quality parge coat from 15–20 years to 25–30 years in GTA conditions, saving thousands of dollars in premature re-parging costs.

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How do I seal around pipe penetrations in the foundation to prevent water and pest entry?

Sealing pipe penetrations through your foundation requires a combination of backer rod, polyurethane caulk, and in some cases hydraulic cement — and it is one of the most important and most neglected waterproofing tasks on any GTA home. Every pipe, cable, conduit, or vent that passes through your foundation wall is a potential entry point for water, cold air, insects, and rodents.

Start by **assessing the gap size** around each penetration. If the gap between the pipe and the concrete is less than 10mm, polyurethane caulk alone will do the job. For gaps between 10mm and 25mm, you need to press closed-cell backer rod into the gap first, leaving roughly 10mm of depth for the caulk on top. For gaps larger than 25mm, fill the bulk of the opening with hydraulic cement (which sets in minutes and is waterproof), let it cure, then apply polyurethane caulk over the hydraulic cement to provide a flexible, watertight seal. The caulk layer is essential because the pipe will expand and contract with temperature changes, and rigid hydraulic cement alone will crack away from the pipe within a few freeze-thaw cycles.

Polyurethane caulk is the correct product for this application — not silicone, not latex, not general-purpose household caulk. Polyurethane bonds aggressively to both concrete and plastic or metal pipes, remains flexible across the full GTA temperature range (-30°C to +40°C), is paintable, and has excellent longevity. Sikaflex 1a and PL Concrete & Masonry are both readily available at GTA building supply stores for \$8–\$15 per tube. For gas line penetrations, use a sealant rated for gas piping contact.

The preparation is critical. **Clean the gap thoroughly** — remove any old caulk, loose concrete, dirt, spider webs, and debris. Use a wire brush or flathead screwdriver to clean out the joint to a depth of at least 10mm. If the concrete around the penetration is crumbling or damaged, chip back to solid material and patch with hydraulic cement before caulking. The surfaces must be clean and dry (or just slightly damp for polyurethane caulk, which actually cures with moisture) for proper adhesion.

For below-grade penetrations — pipes that exit through the foundation below the soil line — surface caulking from the interior is a temporary measure at best. The proper solution is to seal the penetration from the exterior during any excavation or waterproofing project. A rubber boot or link seal can be installed around the pipe at the point of penetration, then covered with waterproofing membrane. If exterior access is not practical, seal from the interior using hydraulic cement and polyurethane caulk, and monitor for any signs of water entry.

Pest entry is a real concern in the GTA. **Mice can squeeze through a gap as small as 6mm**, and common GTA pests like carpenter ants, centipedes, and spiders readily enter through unsealed penetrations. For added pest protection on larger gaps, stuff copper mesh or stainless steel wool into the opening before applying caulk. Unlike

steel wool, copper mesh does not rust and rodents cannot chew through it.

This is a straightforward DIY project for most homeowners. Budget \$30–\$60 for a tube of polyurethane caulk, a roll of backer rod, and a caulking gun. A typical GTA home has 5–15 pipe and cable penetrations through the foundation, and sealing all of them takes 1–2 hours. Inspect your seals annually every spring — freeze-thaw cycling and pipe movement can open gaps over time. If you discover a penetration that is actively leaking water, that indicates hydrostatic pressure against the foundation wall, and you should consult a waterproofing professional to assess whether exterior drainage improvements or waterproofing are needed.

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Q17

What's the best way to seal the gap where my front porch meets the foundation wall?

The gap where a front porch meets the foundation wall should be sealed with a high-quality polyurethane caulk applied over a backer rod — this is one of the most common and most neglected water entry points on GTA homes, and sealing it properly is a straightforward job that prevents costly foundation damage.

This gap exists because the porch and the house foundation are separate concrete structures sitting on separate footings, and they move independently due to frost heave, settling, and thermal expansion. In the GTA, with over 50 freeze-thw cycles per winter, this gap opens and closes seasonally, which is why rigid fillers like concrete or standard mortar crack and fail within one to two winters.

Start by cleaning the gap thoroughly. Remove any old caulk, loose mortar, dirt, and debris using a flat-head screwdriver, putty knife, or oscillating tool. If old caulk is bonded tightly, a caulk removal tool or a utility knife can

help. The sides of the gap — both the porch edge and the foundation wall face — must be clean, dry, and free of loose material for the new sealant to bond. If the surfaces are dusty or chalky, wipe them with a damp cloth and allow them to dry completely.

For gaps wider than 6mm (about a quarter inch), insert a closed-cell foam **backer rod** into the gap before caulking. Backer rod is a round foam rope available at any GTA hardware store for a few dollars per roll. Press it into the gap so it sits about 6-10mm below the surface, creating a consistent depth for the caulk to fill. Backer rod serves two critical functions: it limits the depth of the caulk so it can stretch and compress properly (caulk performs best when the depth is roughly half the width of the joint), and it prevents the caulk from bonding to the bottom of the joint, which would restrict its ability to flex. This three-sided adhesion principle — caulk bonded to both sides but not the bottom — is what allows the sealant to stretch and compress through GTA temperature cycling without tearing.

Polyurethane caulk is the best choice for this application. It bonds tenaciously to both concrete and masonry, remains flexible through extreme temperature swings, is paintable, and lasts 15-25 years in exterior applications. Avoid silicone (it does not bond well to porous concrete and is not paintable) and avoid standard acrylic latex caulk (it hardens and cracks within a few years in GTA weather). Quality polyurethane caulk costs **\$8-\$15 per tube** and one tube typically covers 15-25 linear feet of a standard porch-to-foundation joint.

Apply the caulk with a caulking gun, cutting the nozzle tip at a 45-degree angle to match the joint width. Push the caulk into the joint rather than dragging it across the surface — this ensures the sealant fills the gap and contacts both surfaces for proper adhesion. Tool the bead smooth with a wet finger or a caulk finishing tool immediately after application. Work in sections of 3-4 feet at a time so you can tool the caulk before it begins to skin over.

This is a manageable DIY project that most homeowners can complete in under two hours. Materials for the entire job — backer rod, one to two tubes of polyurethane caulk, and a caulking gun — cost **\$25-\$50**. Professional exterior caulking for a full foundation perimeter including the porch joint runs **\$300-\$1,500** in the GTA, which makes sense if you have multiple joints, window frames, and utility penetrations that all need attention at the same time.

One important note: if the gap between the porch and foundation is wider than 25mm (one inch) or if the porch has noticeably settled, shifted, or tilted, the gap may indicate a structural issue with the porch footing rather than normal thermal movement. In GTA clay soils, porch footings that are too shallow can heave and settle dramatically. A porch that has dropped significantly may need to be lifted and re-supported rather than simply caulked.

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