

Corner Pops



To the left is an example of a proper poly installation. The poly goes all the way to the corner to help keep the corner from popping off

Corner pops are small sections at the corner of a slab that break off and are about as common a hot weather in a Texas summer. Most slab homes and even many pier and beam homes have at least one corner that “pops,” or breaks off at some point. This often raises concerns for buyers who worry that this is an indication of foundation movement or structural problems. To be fair, it is a piece of the foundation, and it is clearly broken.

The good news is that corner pops can be fixed without much trouble and are not, at least by themselves, an indication that there are structural issues or problems with the home.



Improper Poly install shown to the left will likely cause corner pops

When showing these cracks to a client, I will frequently turn around and point to the same crack on the house next door. As home inspectors, we note and include corner pops in our reports so that our clients are aware of and have better understanding of what is causing corner pops to occur.



To the left is a result of the poly not being installed all the way to the corner.

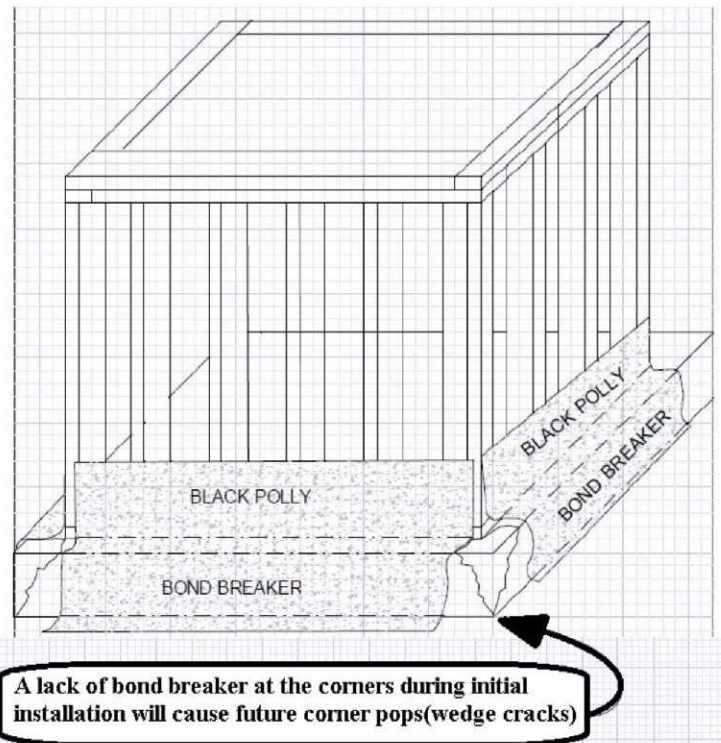
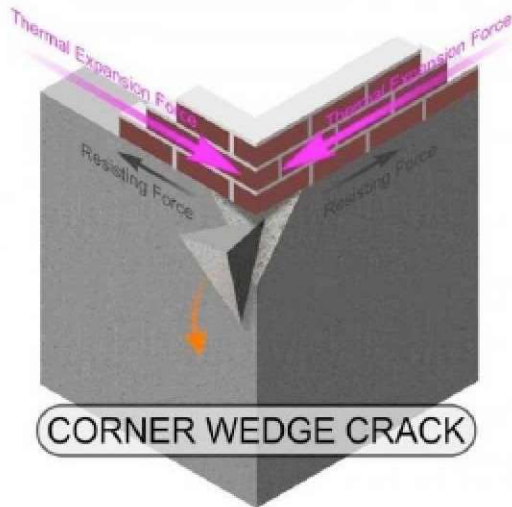
So, what are these things and why are they so common in our area?

First, it is important to understand that the exterior brick is not a structural component of the wall. It looks pretty and keeps the house from floating away but does not support the attic, roof or other structural components.

Second, brick and concrete have different thermal expansion properties. That is, they expand and/or contract at different rates when they heat and cool. So, on a warm summer afternoon, the brick in the wall is going to expand; so is the concrete of the foundation. This expansion is not pretty small, but the difference in the expansion of the brick and the concrete is enough to allow them to move differently.

Third, there is, or is supposed to be, a barrier between the brick and foundation. Typically this barrier is a black poly or plastic. Sometimes you can see a little bit of the black plastic sticking out between the brick and foundation on new houses. However, because of the way this plastic is installed, it is often missing at the corners (see example pictures below).

So, here is what happens: the plastic barrier is missing from the corner. The brick of the wall and the concrete of the foundation are in direct contact and bond together. Then we get a warm Texas day (*read hotter than you-know-where*), and the brick expands more than the concrete... and “Pop! Goes the corner.”



Corner pops can be easily repaired by a homeowner or a handyman in one afternoon. I fixed the corner pops in my last home before we listed it and it took a couple hours for me to get all 4 corners fixed and looking nice for the next buyer. It is important that you or your handyman install a bond breaker between the bottom of the brick and the new corner repair so that it is less likely to happen again. A bonding agent applied to the old concrete will also help the patch to adhere to the old concrete and last longer. After the corner repairs have dried the excess bond breaker (plastic sheathing) can be trimmed flush.