Walk into a room with misted panes and you feel it right away. The light is flatter, the view dulled, the air a touch cooler than it should be. That isn't just aesthetics, it is a sign the sealed unit isn't sealed anymore. As someone who has surveyed hundreds of properties from 1960s semis to new builds, I can tell you that a "blown" double glazed window almost never starts as a dramatic failure. It creeps in, the way a slow puncture does on a tyre, until one day the condensation inside the unit refuses to clear and you realise your energy bill has crept up for no obvious reason.

This guide explains what is actually going on inside that glass sandwich, why seals fail, which mistakes accelerate the process, and how to make clear, cost-sensible decisions about repair, replacement, and prevention. I will also point out a few traps that catch homeowners, particularly with warranties and so-called quick fixes.

What "blown" really means

A modern double glazed unit, or IGU (insulated glass unit), is two panes of glass separated by a spacer bar, with the gap dried by desiccant and often filled with argon. The edges are bonded with a primary seal (usually polyisobutylene, PIB) to keep the gas in and moisture out, and a secondary seal (commonly polysulfide or silicone) to provide structural strength. That assembly is then clamped into the sash with glazing beads and an external weather seal.

When people say a unit has blown, they mean the airtight barrier has been breached. Moist air infiltrates the cavity, the desiccant becomes saturated, and moisture condenses on the inner faces of the panes. You cannot wipe it away because it sits in the cavity. The visual symptom is that milky mist or beads of condensation that change with the weather. In practice, blown units also leak heat. Argon, if it was there, escapes; convection currents establish in the gap; the U-value rises. On a thermal camera, a blown unit shows up as a brighter panel in winter, bleeding warmth.

Not all fogging means a blown unit. If condensation sits on the room-side face when you cook pasta or dry laundry indoors, the glazing might be perfectly sound, but ventilation is poor. Conversely, if the external face sweats on a clear night, that is often a sign of high-performance low-E glass doing its job and radiating heat to the sky. The give-away for failure is moisture trapped between the panes that persists beyond a short humidity spike.

How seals fail: the quiet enemies

Manufacturers design IGUs to handle decades of pressure changes and thermal movement, but the real world is rough. Several forces chip away at the edges long before the glass cracks.

- Cyclic pumping: Every day, the glass warms and cools. The cavity pressure rises and falls. The spacer and seals flex, and over tens of thousands of cycles, micro-channels open. South and west elevations see the worst of it. I have replaced units in garden rooms that see 40 to 50 degrees Celsius at the head on a sunny day and near freezing at night; those seals work hard.
- UV and chemistry: Ultraviolet light degrades sealants over time. Poor-quality secondary seal or a mismatched silicone bead on installation can accelerate breakdown. Some solvent cleaners also attack sealant skins. I once traced a run of failures in a hair salon to aggressive citrus solvent sprayed around the frames daily.
- Water trapping: Frames that hold water at the lower rebate create a permanently damp environment. Timber beads without a drip edge, clogged drainage slots in uPVC, or poorly bedded gaskets invite standing water. Damp plus time equals seal failure.

- Movement and racking: Buildings move. Conservatories and bay windows, especially on older footings, rack a few millimetres seasonally. If packers are missing or glazing is incorrectly toe-and-heeled, the unit edges bear loads they were never meant to carry. You might not notice until wind pressure one winter finishes the job.
- Manufacturing and handling defects: A pinched PIB line in production, a spacer bar cut that leaves a small gap, or a unit stored in baking sun on site before installation. Most factories have good QA now, but cheap imports and rushed installs still appear in the wild. If multiple units fail within a few years, suspect the batch rather than your lifestyle.

The cost of ignoring it

Many people live with a bit of misting for a season. It is tempting, especially if the living room faces the back garden and the view still sort of works. The hidden costs stack up, though.

You lose thermal performance, so rooms take longer to warm and cool faster at night. That means the boiler cycles more, or electric heating runs longer. With gas prices where they have been, a typical 1.2 by 1.2 metre blown unit can add noticeable cost over a winter. You might also invite mould on the reveal because the glass surface runs cooler, so moist indoor air condenses around the edges. I have seen paint blister on internal sills purely due to cold bridging from failed units and damp beads.

Security can become a factor too. A perished external gasket or loose beads, often found alongside failed units, make it easier to pop a bead and remove a pane. Most modern windows have glazing clips to deter this, but older units do not always.

Can you fix blown double glazing?

You have three broad options, each with a niche where it makes sense.

1) Whole window replacement. New frame, sashes, and IGUs. This is the most expensive route and only justified if the frame is rotten, warped, or far below modern performance. Timber frames with widespread decay, early uPVC that has gone brittle and yellowed, or aluminium frames with failed thermal breaks fall into this bracket. Expect several hundred pounds per window opening depending on size and specification.

2) Unit replacement within existing frames. This is the bread-and-butter solution for most cases. A glazier measures the old unit, orders a like-for-like or upgraded IGU, and swaps it in. On a standard casement, the job takes 30 to 60 minutes. Prices vary by size and spec, but a typical 600 by 900 millimetre unit falls in the low hundreds. This is the heart of what many list as Double Glazing Repairs, and it delivers a new warranty on the unit itself.

3) Drill-and-vent “repair” systems. You may have seen services that drill tiny holes, flush the cavity, inject desiccant, and plug the holes. The pitch is that you clear the mist without replacing the unit. I have trialled these on rental properties where the landlord wanted a stopgap. They can clear glass temporarily, especially in dry climates. In the UK and Ireland’s damp, the effect tends to be short-lived. The unit no longer holds gas, the holes remain weak points, and the U-value stays compromised. If budget is tight and resale is imminent, perhaps you live with it or try it, but it is not a long-term cure.

So, can you Fix Blown Double Glazing? Yes, in the sense that you can restore clarity and performance Double Glazing Repairs by replacing the sealed unit. Trying to reseal an old IGU without replacing it does not return it to factory condition. The secondary seal, spacer bar, and desiccant have aged; at best, you slow the decline.

What a good repair looks like

If you ring a company for Misted Double Glazing Repairs, you should expect more than a hasty swap. The difference between a fix that lasts 2 years and one that lasts 12 often lies in the details around the glass.

A competent glazier will check frame drainage, gaskets, and packers. On a uPVC casement, the drainage slots at the bottom of the frame should be clear and the chamber behind them unobstructed. On timber, the beads need a drip groove and a small breather gap at the bottom corners to discourage water pooling. The unit should be toe-and-heeled properly on opening sashes so the hinge side carries the weight when open, not the lock side. I still find heavy doors supported by a single plastic packer under the wrong corner, and those always return with edge failures.

Measurements matter. Units are made 10 to 12 millimetres smaller than the visible aperture to allow a cushion for expansion and packers. If a fitter orders the unit too tight, the edges compress against beads and crack the sealant line under thermal expansion. Too loose, and you risk visible gaps or rattling.

If you are upgrading, consider specifying warm-edge spacers rather than aluminium. They conduct less heat, so the perimeter runs warmer, which reduces condensation risk and eases stress on the seal. A standard 16 mm cavity with argon and a soft-coat low-E pane gives a useful uplift over older air-filled units. If you live near a busy road or under a flight path, ask about laminated acoustic glass with a PVB interlayer. That adds security and noise reduction in one go.

Why warranties matter, and what voids them

Most reputable IGU manufacturers back their units with a 5 to 10 year warranty, sometimes longer for residential. If multiple panes in the same elevation have gone milky within a few years, dig out your paperwork. If the installer is still trading, they may replace them under guarantee. If not, the manufacturer sometimes steps in if you can identify the unit stamp.

Be aware that drilling or “restoration” treatments usually void any remaining guarantee because they damage the original seal. So do some aftermarket films and strong solvents. DIYers sometimes remove glazing beads with a sharp scraper and nick the gasket or frame. That tiny cut collects water and dirt and speeds up failure. If you plan to do anything beyond routine cleaning, photograph the unit stamps first and ask the installer or maker about the effect on coverage.

Everyday habits that shorten the life of a unit

No one deliberately harms their windows, but a handful of common routines do.

Mopping floors with a sopping bucket under a cold window floods the reveal with humid air. Drying clothes on radiators beside the glazing pushes room humidity into the cool edge. Both raise the dew point just where the glass is weakest. Wipeable mould paint is not a cure if the physics encourages condensation daily.

Pressure washing frames feels satisfying, but jetting water at the glazing beads forces water past seals not designed as pressure barriers. Use a garden hose or a bucket, and keep the spray fan gentle.

Curtains that sit against the glass overnight create microclimates. The air trapped behind them cools, drops its moisture, and feeds the perimeter seals with damp. If you can, fit curtains with a slight stand-off or use blinds that leave a small stack gap at the bottom. Night ventilation trickle vents help too.

On timber, paint maintenance is not cosmetic. Exposed end grain at the beads drinks water. I have repaired handsome Victorian sashes where the glazing putty had cracked for years. The units themselves were modern, but the wet timber and failed putty led to perimeter failure far earlier than expected. A thin bead of modern glazing sealant and a fresh coat of microporous paint would have doubled their lifespan.

Weather, orientation, and building quirks

Two houses on the same street can have very different experiences. Prevailing wind drives rain onto one facade more than another. A south-west elevation bakes in summer and takes the brunt of winter storms. Overhanging eaves protect upper windows, whereas ground floor units under a flat roof collect splashback.

New builds settle. If your home is within its first two heating seasons, watch for windows that start to catch or be hard to latch. That is often a frame alignment issue that, left alone, loads the glass edges. Have the hinge packers adjusted. On older properties, look for cracks in the plaster around window heads after a heatwave; it is a hint the opening moved. Glaziers can set packers to accommodate movement better than many general builders assume.

Bodies of water matter. Homes near the coast see salt that accelerates corrosion of metal spacers and hardware. Inland but near a river, seasonal humidity swings are greater. In such climates, warm-edge spacers and silicone secondary seals perform better over the long haul than some older polysulfide systems.

When repair beats replacement, and when it does not

If the frames are sound, replacing the sealed unit is the clear, economic choice. You retain the look of the house and avoid plaster and trim disturbance. You can also seize the chance to upgrade the glass specification without changing the frame profile.

Frames that are bowed, rotten, or warped change the equation. I once inspected 1980s uPVC windows that had gone chalky and brittle. Replacing the units would have been cheap, but the sashes had lost their rigidity, and more than one bead snapped during removal. In that situation, whole window replacement costs more upfront but prevents a string of call-backs and broken beads.

Heritage and conservation areas complicate matters. Slimline double glazed units fitted to traditional timber sashes look superb and perform well when done right, but they have less cavity and narrower spacers. They leave less margin for installer error. If such a unit blows, you probably want the same slimline style again. Choose a maker who specialises in slimline with a proven seal system, not a general fabricator adapting standard spacers.

A simple homeowner’s checklist

Use this to triage and to speak clearly with a glazing firm.

- Is the condensation between panes persistent, or does it clear quickly with weather changes?
- Are the frame drainage slots clear, and do you see water exit during heavy rain?
- How old are the units, and do you have warranty paperwork or manufacturer stamps?
- Do any sashes bind or doors drop, hinting at poor packing or movement?
- Is the misting limited to one or two units, or is it widespread on the same elevation?

Armed with those answers, you can ask for a quote on unit replacement and a frame health check rather than a vague “repair.”

The economics: what I tell clients

A rough guide based on recent jobs: a small bathroom unit might be £120 to £180 to replace with a standard argon-filled, soft-coat low-E IGU. A large patio door panel, £250 to £450 depending on thickness and whether it is toughened. Laminated or special acoustic glass adds 20 to 50 percent. Labour is often included, but expect a minimum call-out charge if you are swapping just one pane far from the installer’s base.

If your heating costs are high and you plan to stay put, upgrading glass when you replace failed units is sensible. A neutral low-E coating plus argon and warm-edge spacers lifts the performance noticeably over 2000s-era units. Triple glazing within existing frames is rarely viable because of weight and bead depth, but you can improve two-pane performance a lot without touching the frame.

For landlords balancing void periods and maintenance, I suggest grouping Misted Double Glazing Repairs and doing a batch per building. You minimise call-outs and get better unit pricing. Tenants rarely report early misting, so plan a visual check each spring.

Care that actually prevents failure

Think of prevention in layers: keep water moving out, keep frames stable, and keep seals out of harsh chemistry.

Clean the external frame and bead lines twice a year with mild soapy water and a soft brush. Poke a cable tie through uPVC drain slots to clear debris. On timber, maintain paint and sealant lines and keep vegetation off the sill. Fit trickle vents if you have chronic indoor humidity; your lungs and the glass will thank you.

If you are replacing roofline elements, make sure drip details send water past the window heads. I have seen new cladding funnel water straight onto frames, which doubled the failure rate on that elevation within five years.

Inside, give curtains a bit of breathing space and ventilate kitchens and bathrooms. Cheap hygrometers cost under a tenner and tell you when humidity sits over 60 percent for long spells. If you have a new baby or dry laundry indoors, that is normal, but consider a dehumidifier as a seasonal tool rather than a permanent crutch.

When you engage a firm for Double Glazing Repairs, ask them to show you the packers before they re-bead. That single question tends to separate careful installers from rush jobs. Correct colour-coded packers at the right corners and a quick demonstration of free drainage are worth more than any glossy brochure.

Special cases and often-missed details

Cat flaps in glazed doors: many are cut into existing glass. If the door has a toughened or laminated unit, cutting is not possible and the entire unit must be remade with a factory-cut aperture. A poorly sealed cat flap often precedes misting at the panel edge. If you plan a pet door, order the new unit with the cutout from the start and ensure the flap kit is compatible with double glazing.

Internal blinds in sealed units: these look tidy and keep dust off, but they add weight and complexity. If such a unit fails, replacement costs more and lead times can stretch to 4 to 6 weeks. Factor that into expectations when choosing them.

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High-rise and access: replacing a third-floor unit over a conservatory can involve scaffolding or a cherry picker. I have seen quotes balloon purely because access was an afterthought. When you gather prices, share photos and mention any obstructions early.

Security glazing: laminated inner panes add security and noise control. If a unit with laminated glass mists, treat it like any other failure, but expect a modest premium for the replacement. Insurance companies sometimes discount premiums if accessible windows have laminated glass; worth asking when planning upgrades.

What professionals do differently

The best repairs look boring. That is a compliment. The beads go back snugly, the sightlines match, and the drainage quietly works. Behind that, the installer will have:

- Taken precise measurements accounting for packer thickness and bead depth, not just the visible opening.
- Specified a warm-edge spacer matching the surroundings, so you do not end up with a dark grey sightline in a sea of light bronze frames.
- Chosen the correct sealant where the unit meets timber or aluminium. A cheap acetoxy silicone can attack some metals and paint; a neutral cure silicone or hybrid polymer is safer.
- Checked the sash for square and adjusted keeps and hinges so there is no twist that will stress the new unit.

If you hear phrases like “just bang it in” or see someone levering beads with a screwdriver without a protective pack, pause the job. A nicked bead or a bent sash corner costs more than the time saved.

Final thoughts from the field

I remember a cottage where the homeowner swore the new units were “cursed.” Three had misted in as many winters. The frames were hand-made oak, beautiful and pricey. The installer had done each replacement quickly and cleanly, yet the failures kept coming back. Standing outside in a shower I noticed the lead flashing above the lintel had a kink that poured water straight onto the head of the frame. The oak soaked, swelled, and squeezed the unit at the top edge. We sorted the flashing, eased the head, refitted with proper packers and a warm-edge

spacer, and those panes are still clear seven years later. Windows tell the truth if you look up, down, and around them, not just at the glass.

Blown double glazing is not a mystery or a moral failing by the homeowner. It is a system that has lost its balance. Restore that balance with a well-made unit, a frame that drains and supports, and a few gentle habits indoors, and you will buy yourself many clear winters. If you are weighing your options, ask for quotes that separate unit costs, labour, any frame adjustments, and optional upgrades. Good firms will welcome the chance to be specific. That clarity saves everyone time, money, and a few foggy mornings.