

Winter storms can lead to leaks

Roofs take a beating after harsh winters

The aftermath of the winter of '97 has many homeowners dreading a repeat performance. After suffering through one of the harshest winters in recent years, the damage done to their roofs was a painful and often costly reminder of nature's fury. In some cases, leaks caused by the harmful effects of high winds, ice dams and snow resulted in hundreds, and even thousands, of dollars' worth of repair bills.

If your roof is leaking, first learn how and why. Leaks can be caused by any or a combination of the following:

- ineffective attic insulation,
- defective shingles,
- improper shingle installation,
- poor ventilation,
- skylights,
- water underneath the shingles as a result of ice dams,
- simply the type of roof design.

Leaks often start small and subtly. Damp walls, peeling wallpaper and condensation on skylights usually are symptoms of a leak. Before you panic, take a deep breath, and follow these steps:

- Learn how to choose a reputable roofer. Talk to friends and neighbors who have had roof work done.
- Get at least three cost estimates (in writing) before selecting your roofing contractor.
- If you need a new roof, know approximately how long your reroofing job should take.
- Negotiate the deposit, and request an itemized list of raw materials. Understand if the contractor will be responsible for disposing of old roofing material.
- Know which roofing product is best for your home in light of the weather conditions in your geographic area.
- Make sure the roofing product you paid for is the one installed.

- Read the manufacturer's warranty carefully, and note the contractor's guarantee of performance. The manufacturer's warranty covers the product — the contractor's guarantee vouches for the quality of the work.

Ask your contractor about waterproofing-underlayment products. Some local building codes, homeowner's insurance and UL standards require that waterproofing shingle underlayment (WSU) be installed under new shingles. Applying WSU is generally considered the accepted means by which to help protect against any leakage that results from water backup. To help avoid future leaks, make sure your contractor uses WSU around vulnerable areas like skylights, flashing, comices and valleys.

Don't assume that the roofing contractor will handle every detail of your job — especially local or municipal issues. Prior to starting the job, check with your local building-codes officer to determine if a permit is required. Also, if the contractor tears off the old shingles, but you agree to handle disposal, you could be fined if the old shingles are not hauled away within a specific time frame. Again, check with your local building-codes officer.

Similarly, if you and your contractor prefer not to deal with disposal of the old shingles, you should know your options and potential liability before allowing the roofing contractor to lay new shingles on top of old ones.

Regardless of which option you select, always determine how and if your ventilation and insulation meet the requirements of the shingle warranty. Shingle warranties often require proper attic ventilation and insulation in order to be enforceable by the homeowner.

For more information, call 1-800-782-8777 for a free copy of CertainTeed Corp.'s brochure, "What You Should Know About Ice Dams and Your Home." As part of its "How-to Series," the company also has other consumer brochures.

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