

## ON THE ROOFTOP Maintain Your Building Roof with Regular Inspections and Maintenance



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WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU WERE ON THE ROOF OF ONE OF YOUR BUILDINGS? DO YOU THINK YOU COULD INVITE PEOPLE UP THERE AND HAVE A PICNIC? Or would your party have to dodge bottles, cans and trash, along with abandoned equipment, nails, tools and other hazards?

The roof is often the most ignored and forgotten property component. But unfortunately, it is one of the most expensive items to replace. Routine, annual inspections are critical to mitigating damage. Some roof manufacturers suggest scheduling at least two inspections a year—one in the spring and one in the fall. But at minimum, a qualified roofing contractor should be called in once a year.

### INSPECT & PROTECT

This inspection should cover the entire roof—flashings, sheet metal and drainage components. Look for leaking or missing condensation lines, as well as loose or missing equipment access panels that can blow off, puncture the roof and causes leaks or discharges. Also check for improperly installed equipment, antennas or satellite dishes; and inspect the roof for any other types of penetrations.

Be sure tenants are maintaining roof top grease guards, too. These should be cleaned routinely. Most grease guard manufacturers highly recommend quarterly cleanings at least.

The annual inspection should involve clearing debris from all gutters and downspouts, roof drain strainers and overflow outlets. The removal of small debris from the entire field of the roof should also be part of this inspection. An especially good roofing contractor will run a large magnet around all rooftop equipment,

picking up any loose screws, wire and other small, sharp debris.

Schedule and complete an annual cleaning if the above items are not included in your roofing contractor's annual inspection. A thorough cleaning, performed at least annually, will more than pay for itself. By cleaning your roof annually, you should save at least one leak repair expense per year. Failure to take this step can quickly shorten the life of any roof.

Following the roof inspection, get a detailed inspection report from your roofing contractor, including an overall assessment and report of all roof conditions. Obtain photographs of any conditions requiring maintenance or immediate repair. An estimate of the roof's remaining service life, and a separate description and cost breakdown by tenant of all tenant-related repair items should also accompany the report.

If your roof has less than five years of remaining life, your roofing contractor may also provide you with replacement cost estimates. This will help you prepare ownership well in advance of the looming replacement.

### PONDERING POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

Without inspections and regular roof maintenance, expect to experience a variety of problems caused by weather, foot traffic and neglect. Uncleared debris can clog roof drains and drain pipes or cause punctures. Clogged drains can lead to ponding water, which can cause any number of issues and will definitely accelerate a roof's deterioration. Additionally, vegetation can grow in water. If that vegetation keeps growing, it will grow into the roof membrane and cause leaks.

If HVAC units continually drop their condensate onto the roof instead of into a pitch pan

and down into the plumbing system, this can also lead to ponding. Small dripping issues will most certainly become larger with time. Water is heavy and the weight could easily climb over your roof's load rate, causing it to collapse.

Pond patches, made from mixing powdered lightweight cement with water and pouring the contents over low-lying areas, typically don't work well, because they simply move the water from one location to another. Tapering insulation can be a repair for ponding, depending on the location. However, to best repair ponding issues, install puddle drains or interior drains.

Heavy snow can cause severe damage, but so can water. If standing water is allowed to freeze, it can lead to total roof collapse. The most common items requiring immediate maintenance are probably loose wall flashings, open vertical laps, under filled pitch pans and sealant failures. All of these will most assuredly lead to leak issues but are easily remedied with the proper repair.

### SEEKING EXPERTISE

When it comes to finding a good roofer, check with other property managers in your area. Get a copy of the roofer's scope of work as it relates to inspections. If possible, get a copy of a couple of inspections they've done so you can see the level of detail they provide.

Roofers have separate personnel and crews for the service, sheet metal and re-roof areas of their business so ask questions relative to the appropriate department. For maintenance work, inquire about the service department. How many crews does it have and how many people are on each crew? What is the typical response time?

Ask if they have products that can stop leaks in the rain and if crews visit in the rain, as some don't, won't or can't. Ask what occurs after that initial repair in the rain. Do they come back after it's dry and do a permanent repair? And are there two charges? Also, know ahead of time what the warranty covers.

Additionally, check to see if the contractor is in good standing with the Better Business Bureau, and get credit references. Consider

whether the contractor is a member of a roofing association. Verify their experience, their insurance coverage and references. If you know what you need, you might see which roofing manufacturers have certified this roofer to work on their warranted systems.

Get a detailed, written proposal with complete descriptions of all work to be covered as it relates to your inspections and cleaning. Less is not always best, so don't hang your hat on pricing alone. Take all things into consideration.

### ABOVE AND BEYOND

You can surely take additional steps beyond annual inspections, cleanings and maintenance to enhance and prolong the life of your roofs.

Limit access to your roof by installing a wall mount ladder with a lockable cage or keeping any other roof access locked. Limit foot traffic, and have walk pads installed if at all possible. If you, your maintenance personnel or your roofing contractor are on your roof routinely, you are in a much better position to hold other service providers accountable for damages attributable to their carelessness.

Preventive maintenance is the most important step toward extending the life of your roof. Regular inspections and frequent, thorough cleanings can not only add years to its life, they are a bargain when compared to new roofing costs. ■



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