Common Roofing Myths and Misconceptions

Setting the Record Straight

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A building’s roof is the first line of protection against rain, sun, and wind.

The roof is often an afterthought until there are major issues, which can:
- Negatively impact occupants.
- Affect integrity of the overall structure.
- Result in costly, time-consuming repairs.

Keeping up with various types of roof systems, configurations and materials available is challenging.
Separate Fact From Fiction

- Pervasive myths and misconceptions cause confusion and frustration when selecting the proper roofing system or approach.

- Understanding the difference between FACT and FICTION can:
  - Prevent future headaches.
  - Avoid erroneous and costly decisions.
**Myth #1**

**FICTION: All roof systems are created equal.**

**FACT:** Some factors may weigh more heavily than others.

- Cost, durability, construction schedule/logistics, maintenance projections
- Condition and composition of the existing roof
- Climate and geographical location
- Configuration and style of the roof area
- Needs of the building occupants

**FIX:** Use a roofing design professional to identify:

- Building- and system-specific details and specifications.
- Site and building conditions that demand special treatment (unusual configurations, strong wind uplift or numerous penetrations, etc.).
Myth #2

**FICTION**: There is no such thing as too much insulation.

**FACT**: Insulation beyond what is required can:
- Trap moisture under a roof and cause significant damage.
- Cause a roof to warp or rot.
- Allow for mold growth.

**FIX**: A roofing design professional can:
- Review applicable building and energy codes to provide the proper amount of insulation.
Myth #3

**FICTION:** “Flat” roofs are prone to leaks.

**FACT:** Flat roofs are not actually flat, but “low-slope.”

**FIX:** For a low-slope roof to adequately shed water, it must:

- Have minimum pitch of \( \frac{1}{4} \)” per foot.
- Include the proper number of sufficiently sized drains, scuppers, and gutters in the proper location.
- Consider building location, exposure, and existing structure to determine the roof system’s capacity to support weight of collecting and drifting snow.
Myth #4

**FICTION:** Wet insulation can be re-used.

FACT: Wet insulation is failed insulation because:

- It no longer provides thermal protection.
- It can cause deterioration in the roofing materials above and below.

FIX: Wet insulation must always be removed and discarded prior to repairing, re-covering or replacing a roof.
Myth #5

**FICTION: Gutters and drains are separate from the roofing system.**

FACT: Gutters, drains and downspouts are important components of the overall drainage system.

- Drains prevent ponding of water on the roof’s surface to avoid overloading the structure.
- Gutters and downspouts transport water from the roof and away from the building’s facades and foundations.
- Clogged drains and gutters can result in leaks below the roof and behind walls.

FIX: For a drainage system to help prevent damage and deterioration of the roof system and structure, it must be:

- Properly designed and installed.
- Cleaned regularly to prevent the back-up of debris and sediment.
**Myth #6**

**FICTION:** Any contractor or handyman can install or repair a roof.

**FACT:** Using an uncertified contractor may:
- Result in incorrect installation and premature failure.
- Result in the use of inappropriate or unsafe methods of installation.
- Incur additional expenses for time and materials.
- Preclude issuance of a manufacturer’s warranty.

**FIX:** A roofing design professional can identify a contractor who:
- Is well versed in the basics of roof replacement procedures.
- Adheres to design specifications or manufacturers’ requirements.

Note: A field representative (roofing design professional) should be present to observe installation.
Myth #7

Fiction: New roofing systems can always be installed over existing systems.

Fact: Best results are gained from complete replacement, which:
- Eliminates the possibility of trapping moisture in the old system.
- Allows for thorough inspection of the roof deck.
- Permits deterioration in the substrate to be remedied.

A recover project might be viable and more economical, resulting in:
- A shorter project schedule and fewer materials to remove.
- Better ability to maintain a water-tight structure during reroofing.

Fix: Determine whether recovering is feasible by:
- Examining the existing building structure and code requirements.
- Determining if the roof deck is structurally sound.
- Looking at many criteria, such as fire resistance/wind uplift requirements.
Myth #8

**FICTION: Flashings do not require attention until a new roof is installed.**

FACT: Flashings can deteriorate quickly if not installed or maintained properly.

- Loose, cracked or broken flashings can allow water to penetrate behind a wall surface or below a roof membrane.
- Often, flashings are only addressed when an entirely new roof is being installed.
- It is often assumed that since most roof counter flashings are made of metal, they are strong enough to last for a significant amount of time before requiring replacement or repair.

**FIX: Periodic inspection of the flashings will allow for the identification of potential issues before they become a larger problem and result in leaks.**
**Myth #9**

*FICTION: New roofs do not require maintenance.*

FACT: Failure to regularly inspect and maintain a roof can result in leaks.

- Many warranties require yearly inspection and regular repairs.
- Typical maintenance includes:
  - Removal of debris from the roof, drains, and gutters.
  - Repair of any damaged roof coverings and flashings.

FIX: The National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) recommendations for maintenance and repair:

- At least twice a year.
- Before and after severe weather seasons and events.
Myth #10

**FICTION:** Roof inspections are not required unless damage and leaks are evident.

**FACT:** Delayed action can result in damage that is more expensive than just fixing the leak.

**FIX:** A proactive approach can save money and reduce downtime.
- Inspect the structure frequently over the life of the roof.
- Catch and repair little problems early to avoid bigger and more costly work.
- Respond promptly to signs of deterioration.
- Plan ahead for roof maintenance and replacement.
Myth #11

FICTION: There is no need to consider replacing a roof until it fails.

FACT: Replacing an aging roof assembly before problems arise can be more fiscally responsible.

- Advance planning allows time to reflect on available options.
- Emergency reroofing can be costly.

FIX: Planning ahead allows the prudent building owner or manager time to consider the best choices for the available budget and for the building’s needs.
Myth #12

**FICTION:** A warranty is the best protection.

**FACT:** The best guarantee of roofing durability is a well designed, manufactured, and installed system.

- Warranties are largely reactive, rather than proactive.
- It may be difficult to get a manufacturer to send an inspection team to look at the roof, much less fix it.
- Installation procedures will be scrutinized to determine if all materials and methods fit the terms of the warranty agreement.
- Even after repair, the same defect could fail again (potentially outside of the warrant period).

**FIX:** Scrutinize the requirements for a long-term warranty to identify any potential weaknesses in a product or technology.
Setting the Record Straight

- Consider typical roofing assumptions.
- Save resources.
- Design appropriately, install correctly, and maintain diligently.
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Questions?