

# Emerging Trends

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## ON THE UP AND UP

Protecting your restaurant's roof through preventive maintenance and regular inspections

Roofs are one of the most expensive assets in a restaurant, and they tend to take quite a bit of punishment. Unfortunately, roofs are often not included in a building's preventive maintenance program. Problems may only be noticed when a water leak develops.

Roof issues can be caused by flying debris, structural movement, neglect, stress, abuse and normal aging. Preventive roof maintenance is extremely important—especially given the low margins within the restaurant industry—and can ensure that the restaurant roof is properly serviced and will last for the full lifecycle. Most restaurants and facility managers do not have a contract in place for preventive roof maintenance, but the times are changing. To maximize the life of this important asset, you must schedule periodic inspections, which can be completed by either in-house personnel or hired professionals.

### Prioritizing Inspections

I had a great discussion with Chris Shermach, Corporate Accounts Manager from Versico Roofing Systems, about best practices for maintaining restaurant roofs. His biggest priority is to establish periodic inspections completed by personnel trained in roofing inspections—specifically of single-ply systems, which make up the majority of roofs in the industry.

Shermach recommends including the following to-dos on your roof inspection checklist:

- Look for grease accumulation. If any exists, have it cleaned up as soon as possible. Most single-ply systems can be cleaned with a simple mixture of warm water and soap. Check with the roofing supplier for approved cleaning chemicals and methods.
- Check grease containment devices for proper capture and operation and cleanliness of the filtering material.

- Watch for ponding water. This should be gone a day or so after it rains.
- Remove any items on the roof that could cause a puncture.
- Ensure walkways are provided in high-traffic areas.
- Clean all clogged roof drains. This is very important after a storm.
- Inspect all roof penetrations for proper sealing (curbs, drains, piping, roof hatch, etc.).
- Check all roof seams and flashings for proper adherence.
- Perform a general walk-around, noting the condition of the roof.
- Create a maintenance access log to track who has accessed the roof. This may prove valuable if damage occurs. A comprehensive log should include the name of the individuals, date, time, who granted access and purpose of access.

The best way to ensure your roof life is being maximized is to have the original installer complete a walk-through, checking off elements of the above list. Some roofing companies will even extend their standard warranty several years by having this walk-through formally completed each year. The extra coverage will more than pay for the cost of the inspections. This also is extremely important to the roofing supplier, as it tells them their product is being properly maintained. They have an enormous amount of money invested in providing the standard 20- to 30-year warranties.

### Material Considerations

Food consisting of animal products contains high amounts of fats and oils. As meat is cooked, the vapors are exhausted through the hood, ductwork and roof fans. Invariably, these fats and oils are not fully contained, and some of the material ends up on the roof. This is detrimental for almost all types of roofing materials.

Built-up, modified bitumen, EPDM and TPO roof warranties normally do not cover grease, oil or petroleum product damage. PVC roof warranties, in general, cover damage from these products—which is why this type of roofing material is the leader in our industry. Even though PVC roofs withstand the damaging effects, you still must provide grease containment on or around the

exhaust fans that are handling grease-laden vapors, as they can cause damage to other items on the roof.

Besides roof damage, grease can also increase the chances of slip-and-fall incidents, fire hazards and EPA violations, which result from water runoff into the municipal sewer system or into nearby areas. There are several types of grease-containment systems available, each with their own pros and cons. Needless to say, these containment devices are a must for any restaurant emitting contaminated vapor. Future exhaust fan designs will enable better grease control through fan performance and housing designs.

According to Shermach, upcoming trends for PVC roofs include a different chemical composition, which will increase the overall strength and durability of the roof. Manufacturers are also imbedding moisture sensors that will tell facility managers exactly where a leak exists, which will improve response time, minimize the cost of repair and, most importantly, protect the facility from major water damage.

Another item to consider for new or replacement roofs is increasing the thickness of the material. The roof standard is 50 mil, but increasing that to an 80-mil thickness will provide additional protection for punctures, improve wearability and, in some cases, increase the warranty period by five to 10 years. The increased cost should provide a good ROI through lower maintenance charges and better protection to the restaurant.

It's time to consider investing in a preventive maintenance program for one of the most important assets in a restaurant: the roof. It's often overlooked, but more facility professionals are recognizing it pays to have formal periodic inspections to extend the roof life and protect the restaurant from costly water damage.

Special thanks to Chris Shermach of Versico Roofing Systems for providing valuable input and insight for this article. I'm always looking for feedback. Feel free to contact me at (972) 805-0905, ext. 3, or email [jeff@rfmaonline.com](mailto:jeff@rfmaonline.com).

Dover and out.

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