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A Roof With a Point of View

William Pegnato

The value of treating your roof as an asset rather than an afterthought

The old paradigm for managing roofs starts with the two main design considerations: cost and warranty length. Typically, if a company is building multiple units, conserving capital is critical and affects how systems for the building are purchased. The problem with the roof system, however, is that it typically accounts for 10 percent of the cost of the building but 90 percent of the problems. What gives the owner a false sense of security is that the roof, though purchased at a very competitive price, has a long warranty period (usually 10 or more years). So the owner believes he is “covered.”

A Growing Problem

As the owner moves into the operations phase of managing a building, this fifth wall is out of sight and out of mind. “I don’t have to worry about it because it is not leaking, and I have a good warranty,” he or she thinks.

Inevitably, a few years down the line, the restaurant has leaks. Since the roof is under warranty, the facility manager calls the original roofing contractor back. Typically, the contractor finds that the leaks are due to activity of other trades on the roof. And often the warranty that the owner has been counting on is not valid because he or she has not instituted the required maintenance program.

The leak gets fixed, but usually the leak is a symptom, not the problem. The roof is deteriorating and will continue to leak. Clogged drains will exacerbate the problem and may present hazardous situations. Eventually the operation of the restaurant will be affected as it disrupts customer service.

The problem continues to grow and the owner decides to solve it by putting on a new roof. This premature capital expenditure is unfortunately well before the life expectancy of the original system. The design considerations here again are cost and warranty, and the cycle starts over again.

The New Paradigm

The new paradigm for roof management is viewing the roof as a strategic platform. It is viewed as an “asset” to be taken care of, as a system that provides moisture protection, saves energy and can be used as a platform for energy production.

It all starts with changing your design considerations when you are building from the ground up or replacing a roof on an existing structure. These include high reflectivity that ensures energy conservation and high emissivity that reduces the greenhouse effect. The owner also should seek materials that are recyclable and coatable for potential future restoration and have a low cost with a good warranty.

Another key design consideration is identifying sources of energy production, such as solar thermal, PV and wind. This analysis includes the geo/political environment of each location. It must take into consideration the climate and government and utility rebates. In many cases, these energy-producing systems that can be installed on the roof have two- to three-year paybacks that meet most company’s ROI criteria. They also can become an important part of a company’s sustainability initiative.

Proactive Maintenance

As the roof moves into the operations phase—because this system is viewed as an asset to be taken care of—an annual maintenance program is instituted. The cost of this type of proactive program is actually less than the alternative for reactive leak service. The benefits of this program include less customer service disruption as

leaks are minimized, small problems are identified and fixed before they become large, disasters such as a roof collapse are avoided, warranties are maintained and premature capital expenditures are avoided.

As the portfolio starts to age under this proactive program, candidates for roof restoration can be identified and taken advantage of. Roofs can be restored with new state-of-the-art coatings that contribute to energy savings as well roof life extension. And, by the way, they come with additional warranty periods (as much as 10 years).

A key component of the annual maintenance program is the data collection. With this data, owners are now able to have a fully integrated platform management system for managing a roof portfolio as a strategic asset. This will be a powerful lever for maximizing the sustainable value of a building portfolio. It will give owners peace of mind when managing an increasingly complex element of the building. It will provide a systematic approach that connects the roof management with other building systems. And it will allow management to take a more proactive approach to decisions about asset, capital and cost management.

The point of view from these rooftops will be sustainable, long lasting, efficient and dry.

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