



“Up On Top” Newsletter

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Forecasting Roof Life Cycles

Determining how much life there is remaining in a roofing system, whether it has just been installed or after it has endured years of abuse from the elements, is a difficult task.

Initially, manufactures perform lab tests on sample materials to simulate weathering and its effect on various physical properties over time. Although these tests are important toward producing quality and durable roofing materials, the only true tests for roofing systems is actual time on the roof of a building, exposed to the “real world conditions” and abuse.

When we refer to “real world conditions”, we mean what actually happens to a roof after it has been installed on top of a building and is exposed to a variety of elements. Some of these environmental conditions consist of the following:

- Sun
- Cold/Ice
- Sudden temperature changes, such as a cold rain on a warm day
- Ponding water
- Dirt
- Algae
- Pollution
- Different expansion and contraction rates of the components used to make up the roofing system

Some factors that determine the longevity of a roof include:

Type of Surface Protection - It is extremely important, especially in asphalt based products, to protect the

roofing membrane from direct exposure to the sun. Types of protective surfacing include gravel, coatings, granules, etc.

Type of System - There are various types of roofing systems to choose from and each type will provide various results. For instance built up roofing may be installed with two, three, four, or five felt plies. Generally speaking the more plies the longer the life expectancy.

Drainage - Ponding water is never a good thing for most roofing systems, although some systems like coal tar pitch and single plies are more adept at withstanding the degrading effects of standing water.

Regular Inspections and Maintenance - This is a must if roof longevity is to be achieved. It is important to catch any developing defects within a roofing system early on prior to the defect expanding like cancer within the system. If a defect can be identified and repaired prior to it leaking, the roof system will have a much better chance at lasting well beyond the national average of 12 years.

As you can see from these partial list of factors, there are many things to consider when determining how long a roofing system actually lasts during real world conditions. However, it can be guaranteed that if a roof system is not maintained readily and properly during its service life, it will fail much sooner than it would with proper maintenance.

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