

SERVICE WORKS

“UP ON TOP” NEWS

Finding and Fixing Roof Leaks

It should be the most elementary of projects: There's water coming in, so you need to find and fix the leaks. Only after you chase leaks, call the roofing contractor back (again), and get more involved than you ever wanted to be, can roof leaks *truly* be fixed.

Depending on your roofing files, you may be lucky enough to have retained the address and phone number of the roofing contractor that installed the roof system. But suppose the roof is more than a couple of years old.

You'll find out the hard way that the roofing contractor's warranty only covered workmanship – and only for the first 2 or 3 years. (Still, it's always a good idea to have the original contractor find and fix defects.) Ongoing maintenance programs between the roofer and building manager *do* exist, with costs for time

and materials spelled out in advance.

You may have a copy of the manufacturer's roof warranty and discover (to your satisfaction) that the roof is still under warranty. If you've followed the manufacturer's warranty instructions, you have formally contacted them for help with the leaks. Only *approved* contractors can do repairs under the manufacturer's warranty. There have been many mergers in the roofing industry, so it may take some serious probing to find out who's currently honoring the warranties. Some major roofing manufacturers have left the roofing field entirely, but may have a technical expert available to assist in resolving issues with outstanding warranties.

Many older buildings have cellulosic thermal insulation, such as wood fiber and perlite, or an open structure that water can pass through, such as glass fiber. In these cases, moisture surveys using infrared, nuclear, or capacitance techniques can detect wet insulation.

Start with the structural deck. Your roofing file may tell you what this is, or you may have to lift a few ceiling tiles to get a peek. If the deck is steel, remember that the leaking water will try to follow the direction of the slope; if the deck corrugations are parallel to the slope, then the water will run downhill until it finds a gap, such as a lap in the decking or a hole. If the deck is properly sloped to drain, the water may be coming in because the deck was cut to accommodate the drain bowl, but the hole in the deck was never sealed.

Check the drains from the roof side. Remove the screen and see if the bolts that squeeze the clamping ring to the

drain bowl are there, or if a couple of bolts are loose or have broken off. Just like when bolting the spare tire to your auto wheel, the bolts should work in tandem, squeezing the membrane uniformly to create a watertight gasket.

On roofs with a lot of equipment, mechanical units are always suspect, especially if frequent maintenance (i.e. to replace filters, fan belts, etc.) is necessary. Access doors may not be tightly sealed or might be missing completely. Hose tests may identify leak sources quickly. (Having an associate down below with a cell phone or walkie-talkie is recommended.)

Roof flashings are always under suspicion because flashings make a connection between different roof components at a change of elevation, such as at the intersection of the deck and wall. Thermal or structural movement increases stress at these locations, usually manifested as diagonal wrinkling, tearing, or pulling away from the wall. Fortunately, torch-grade modified bituminous materials are now available to make durable repairs.

Roof membranes are penetrated for all sorts of reasons. Sheet-metal pans are placed over the roof membrane and the pitch-pocket is then filled with a waterproof sealant. The sealant will shrink over time and can be maintained by adding more filler – usually asphalt mastic. More durable and flexible filler materials such as pourable sealers are also very versatile.

Finding and fixing roof leaks is as much an art as it is a science, and best left to a qualified roofing contractor.



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