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Is your roof ready for Winter?

Ready or not, winter is almost upon us, and your roof will be subjected to everything Mother Nature can throw at it.



It's not difficult to clean, inspect and prepare most roofs for the winter, and the time and effort could add years to the useable service life of your roof.

Cleanup and inspection

Winterizing in lower B.C. should begin in mid-fall. Clear the roof of any fallen tree limbs and leaves. Roofing materials become more brittle when they are cold, so you don't want branches, twigs, ladders, dirt or other debris resting on the roof surface. Debris can also cause mould, fungus and mildew to grow on membranes and shingles.

If it's been dry for a few days, a leaf blower can make short work of the bulk of the buildup. A soft-bristle push broom will help you clean the surface, working from the top down.

While you're up there, check for obvious damage. If you note any missing shingles or broken tiles these are red flags. On membrane roofs check for inadequately sealed seams, poor adhesion, splits, soft areas, and erosion of granules on the cap sheet. If there are any issues, this is the best time to call for a professional inspection and repairs.

Now that the roof surface is clean, clear the gutters of any leaves and debris. Clean-flowing gutters will be essential to minimize ice buildup once the colder weather sets in. Test the integrity of your downspouts with a hose. The water should flow out of the bottom freely, with proper drainage at the base.

Be very careful working on a roof. If you're not comfortable being up there, call a roofer.

Attic inspection

Your roof and gutters should now appear intact and be ready for the coming heavy rains and meltwater. It's time to move to the attic.

Check the underside of the roof for signs of water damage. Water stains can indicate existing leaks or poor insulation. Is any of the insulation damp? Any signs of mould or mildew? Poor insulation often contributes to leaks over time and can weaken the roof. In addition, inadequate insulation can cause your home's heat to escape. This drives up energy bills and can cause ice damming.

Stains on the wood are also a primary indicator of condensation due to inadequate air movement. Deficient air flow is typically caused by lack of soffit intake or roof top exhaust vents. Soffit intake can also be compromised by improperly installed insulation in the attic space.

If portions of the roof insulation appear in need of replacement, the exterior roofing material should be inspected by a roofing professional as well.

Keep a watchful eye for ice damming

Your roof's edge is its first line of defence against inclement weather. If you notice standing water, loose gutter fasteners or flashing metal, faded paint or signs of water damage, call your roofing contractor.

During periods of freezing temperatures, it's important to periodically check the roof for ice damming. Ice damming occurs when heat escapes through the roof and melts snow on the rooftop. The meltwater collects at obstructions or in the gutters. As the water re-freezes, it forms an ice dam. Melting snow is unable to slide from the roof and water builds up.

Ice dams can cause serious damage to a roof due to the added weight. To reduce this risk, clear the snow from the roof with a long push broom or snow rake whenever snow begins to pile up more than a few inches. Another safe way to remove snow buildup is with calcium or magnesium chloride pellets. Do not use water or hot air to remove snow from your roof.

Final thoughts

Have you completed your pre-winter roof checkup for this season? How did it go? I welcome your comments and questions below.

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