Maintenance is the key to performance

by **Mark S. Graham**

Roofing professionals agree that a roof system requires good design, quality materials and proper installation to perform successfully. But once a roof system has been installed, nothing is more critical to its long-term performance than proper maintenance.



Although building owners spend considerable time and resources on roof system purchasing decisions, many put little or no effort toward properly maintaining their roof systems. The situation is exacerbated by roofing professionals who do not educate their clients about the importance of proper roof system maintenance.

Roof warranties

Building owners' purchasing decisions typically are influenced by warranties provided by either roofing materials manufacturers or roofing contractors. There is a common misconception among some building owners that long-term warranties are all-inclusive insurance policies intended to apply to virtually any roofing problem, regardless of cause or circumstance. As a result, after a new roof system that features a long-term warranty is installed, a building owner may neglect or ignore the need for roof system maintenance.

However, most roof system warranties are reactive, rather than proactive, solutions to roofing problems. For example, most warranties provide for only limited repairs once a roofing problem (e.g., leakage) is detected if the problem is included within the warranty's limited coverage.

Also, most roof system warranties contain specific provisions that require building owners to properly maintain roof systems during the warranties' terms. A warranty does not replace the need for roof system maintenance.

Preventative maintenance

The intent of preventative maintenance is to enable building owners to proactively identify and implement solutions to roof system problems before they become widespread. In many cases, if a problem is identified early and properly repaired, the extent and cost of repairs will be significantly less than if problems were unattended.

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NRCA recommends building owners schedule roof system maintenance inspections at least biannually. These inspections can be conducted by a building owner's personnel if they have a general knowledge of the roof system and follow proper roofing safety procedures. If a building owner does not have his own personnel or is not comfortable having them perform roof system maintenance inspections, a professional roofing contractor should be retained.

A preventative-maintenance inspection typically consists of a thorough visual inspection of a roof system and its adjacent surfaces (e.g., walls), as well as mechanical equipment that can impact the roof system's waterproof integrity. Conditions typically are recorded in writing and photographed, and the documentation should be maintained in a file. Such a file can be useful during future inspections because it can provide a basis for comparison of changing roof system conditions.

During an inspection, it is recommended that any debris or other materials that do not specifically belong on the roof be removed. If repairs are necessary, routine repairs sometimes can be carried out immediately. If repairs cannot easily be made at the time of inspection, they should be implemented as soon as possible to avoid further roof system deterioration. NRCA recommends a professional roofing contractor conduct any repairs beyond what would be considered routine.

An additional benefit of establishing an ongoing preventative-maintenance program is that it allows for a planned, organized approach to management of a roof asset, as well as for responsible, timely preparation of long-term capital expenditures.

Additional information

To ensure roof systems last the duration of their service lives, roofing professionals should provide building owners with information regarding the importance of proper roof system maintenance.

Several roofing materials manufacturers have developed documents detailing the need for proper maintenance. These documents are intended to be provided to building owners at the end of roofing projects when manufacturers' warranties are delivered.

NRCA also offers useful roof system maintenance information to building owners. NRCA publishes two Consumer Advisory Bulletins and three inspection, maintenance and repair documents that are directed toward building owners of built-up, modified bitumen, single-ply and spray polyurethane foam-based roof systems.

Whether roofing professionals use the documents provided by roof system manufacturers or NRCA or develop their own materials, they should convey the importance of proper roof system maintenance to building owners. PR

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