

# Ignoring roof woes can be risky business

BY MICHELLE ARNTZ  
Special to the Record-Eagle

There's nothing glamorous about roof repair. For me — with aging shingles gently waving at me from the road every day — replacing a 20-something-year-old roof was the responsible thing to do.

The National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) suggests that homeowners seasonally inspect their existing roofs for problems. A small leak can grow for two to four years before a homeowner who doesn't inspect regularly notices. Sun, rain, wind, snow, ice, condensation and trees are all enemies of the roofing shingle.

The calling card of a neglected roof may be leaks in the attic, water-stained ceilings, peeling paint on walls, shingle debris found in the yard and uneven room temperatures within the house.

Not knowing one company from another meant a trip through the yellow pages. In the Grand Traverse area phone book, there are over 40 contractors listed. With a healthy carpet of algae home-steading on my curled, cracked asphalt shingles, the selected contractor confirmed that a new roof was in order.

According to McCormick Construction, a homeowner should hire a licensed and insured company.

"And ask to see proof," said owner Josh McCormick.

Before work begins, McCormick said that contractors should always provide the resident with a written estimate. Included in the bid, should be the cost of materials, labor, removal and disposing of the old shingles.

"I suggest that the homeowner get three bids before hiring a contractor," said McCormick.

Michael Smith, owner of the family-operated Vinyl Sash, agreed.

"Choose a roofer that you feel comfortable with and be sure to get references," Smith said. "The lowest price is not always your best choice."

He said that along with being insured and licensed, a good contractor should conduct himself with professionalism and possess good communication skills.

Choosing to work alone in the field, McCormick said that his customers can usually expect to have a job

completed from written estimate to area clean-up within one week of contact. Of course, Michigan weather can impact this goal from time to time.

According to McCormick, a contractor should be able to return your call within 24 hours to make arrangements to do an on-site estimate.

Typically a homeowner is charged "by the square." In simplified terms, a square is a 10-foot by 10-foot area. Some roofs containing an unusual number of "valleys" and dormers may add to the cost. Being a licensed builder, McCormick also discusses repairing any structural problems he might notice while up on a roof. When asked if it is always necessary to tear off the existing roof, McCormick said he usually recommends it.

"A lot of houses in town have two layers on the roof. To ensure quality work, I won't add a third layer over that," McCormick said. Older homes with aging shingles can affect the longevity of the new roof.

The homeowner needs to decide what weight shingle, termed in life ratings, is best to have installed.

Both contractors recommend a 30-year life shingle.

Working as an independent contractor for Mid-Town Development last winter, McCormick said that Michigan's moderate-temperature months of spring and fall are optimal seasons for roof installing new shingles.

"The product reacts to climate conditions," McCormick said.

Roofing contractors in the area agree that it is wise to

keep roofs relatively clear of snow. Left to melt, the snow may refreeze at the roof's overhang. With that, an ice dam will form. If this happens, water may seep into the home's interior, causing rot, mold and condensation that will promote roof decay.

Removing ice build up should be done carefully to avoid damaging the shingles. The NRCA also recommends that homeowners check that the condition of the flashing installed around chimneys and vents.

According to a report from the *Do It Yourself* Web site, with a typical household producing up to five pounds of water vapor per day, a proper ventilation system is the most important factor in prolonging the life of your roof. A complete system consists of both air intake and exhaust vents, allowing the home's warm and cool air to circulate within the infrastructure.

Without this, excess moisture will soak into a roof's plywood, causing the rot. When this happens, nails are loosened out of the wet wood by wind and other elements. Ice dam build-up is yet another sign that your home is not properly ventilated.

McCormick Construction recommends contacting a professional to remove snow and ice build-up. Sources on the *Do-It-Yourself* Web site agree. Not only do homeowners risks damaging the shingles, but they may also risk personal injury.

Michelle Arntz is a local freelance writer.

# Set your remodeling sights south — in the basement

BY BRENDA PROTZ  
Copley News Service

Have your children moved back home? Do you not have enough space in your house? Do your grandchildren need more places to play? If so, you are not alone. Today's family dynamics have changed — and with those changes many families find they need more space.

One popular solution is to finish a basement that may have only been extra storage space before.

Basements today have graduated from days of old when they were merely dark spaces where a water heater was contained. They are now extensions of the home and have many uses.

Ed Miller has been a residential remodeler for more than 17 years. He says there is much to consider before starting a job. After deciding if your basement is a dry one that won't cause health problems due to mold growth, you then need to decide who will do the job.

"You should get a reputable person to do the job. Get references through word of mouth and find out if the person is a remodeler or a builder. And find out who is actually going to be doing the job."

Miller stressed the latter because subcontracting work is a common practice. This isn't a bad thing to do, but it's important to know if this will occur on your job. If it is, find out if the contractor will be on the job every day.

One of the most important things, in his opinion, is very rarely addressed by the homeowner, says Miller. "Most people never even

ask if you are insured. They should ask for proof of insurance from the remodeler and anyone he is subcontracting out. If someone is working on your house and has an injury, the homeowner would be liable."

Some might disagree, but Miller also thinks that homeowners should try to do some of the remodeling themselves.

"It gives them a sense of accomplishment and more respect for the professionals," he said.

When Miller is hired for such work, he encourages homeowners to take on the simple parts of the job, like painting, to help keep costs down.

The most common uses for basement areas are a family or recreation room, an office or bedroom space.

And whether you do the work yourself or hire a professional, building codes will have to be adhered to, a construction permit will need to be obtained and a building inspector will need to sign off on the completed work.

Realtor Margie Zimmerman has been selling homes for more than 25 years and says finished basements generally help the resale value of the home, but says that homeowners need to keep a few things in mind.

"In smaller homes, finishing the basement will definitely help sell it. A lot just depends on the size of the home."

Miller says a lot of the jobs he sees involves finishing part of the basement while still leaving an area unfinished for what he calls the "guy area," or the area

where the furnace and water heater might go.

Zimmerman added some other things to consider when determining the type of basement you want to do.

"You should keep it in line with the rest of the homes in the neighborhood. You don't want to do a cheap basement job in a higher-priced home and you don't want to spend too much on a moderately priced home's basement," Zimmerman said.

Miller says when thinking of finishing a basement you should do it for the right reasons.

"Traditionally, if you put a dollar into your house, you won't get a dollar back. You should redo your basement for personal comfort or maintenance reasons, not just for resale."



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