

Assessing and Repairing Leaky Roofs

Safely Fixing a Watery Problem

You may be anxious to stop a roof from leaking, but don't risk serious injury trying to inspect or repair it. First, try binoculars for a closer view. Next, check the attic for a drip trail. Leaks are rarely located directly above the water spot on the ceiling. When you find a leak in the attic, push a nail, straw or wire through it to help you or a repair person locate it outside.

If rain continues to be a problem and a repair person is unavailable, follow the directions at right for temporary relief. But be sure that only a physically able person gets on the roof for these emergency measures. Unsteadiness on the ladder or roof can lead to severe injuries.

Temporary Repairs

Cover holes in the roof, walls or windows with boards, tarps or plastic sheeting. Nail down plastic sheets or trash bags with strips of wood and secure them with duct tape. If the holes are large, you may need to support the plastic in the center to keep it from ripping from the weight of the rain.

If sections of the roof or floors are sagging, have a contractor or other knowledgeable person brace weak areas. Improper bracing may increase damage and the chance of injury, so do not attempt this work unless you are experienced in structural repairs.

Causes of Leaks

Storm and wind damage are responsible for some roof problems. Others are caused by defective materials, faulty construction or gradual deterioration. Here are some common causes of leaks:

Defective flashing. Flashing is the sheet metal used in waterproofing roof valleys, hips and the angle between a chimney and a roof. Wet spots near a chimney or outside wall may mean the leak is caused by defective flashing, narrow flashing or loose mortar joints. Look for corroded, loose or displaced flashing on sloping roof valleys and at junctions of dormers and roof.

Clogged downspouts or eaves. Check for choked downspouts. Accumulated water or snow on the roof above the flashing may cause a leak. Ice accumulations on eaves sometimes form ridges, which cause melting snow to back up under the shingles.

Cracks and deterioration. Roofing (especially wood or composition shingles) usually deteriorates first on southern exposures. Check southern slopes for cracking or deterioration.

Holes. Missing shingles or holes in the roofing may be causing wet spots. To find holes, check for a drip trail or spot of light coming through in the attic. Stick a nail, straw or wire through the hole to mark the spot on the outside.

Repairing Leaks

Methods of repair will depend on the kind of roofing and the nature and extent of the leak. Unless you are experienced, hire a professional roofer for this work. Missing shingles should be replaced, holes repaired and cracks filled. Whatever method is used, avoid walking on patched sections.

Related Publications:

["Repairing Your Flooded Home."](#) American Red Cross/Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1992.