

“Up On Top” News

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Repairs vs. Reroofing

Building owners are frequently forced to address roofing problems according to Mother Nature’s schedule – not their own. Because of this, they’re often confronted with having to make roofing decisions when they’re not financially prepared, or when they’re lacking adequate information to reach a sound roofing decision.

Whether the problems are insidious leaks that are staining ceilings, walls, and ruining carpets, problems that interfere with operations within, or catastrophic losses, such as fire, wind blow-off, or a hail-storm, these decisions must be made promptly.

The first choice is usually repair, based on its relatively low cost. At what point, however, is such a measure uneconomical? Every roof eventually reaches the point where it can’t be maintained by inexpensive repairs. Also many building codes require that, when more than simple repairs are made, the entire roof must be brought up to the current code requirements.

Once it has been decided that a particular roof is beyond repair, then re-cover, retrofit, and replacement options arise.

- *Re-cover is the superimposition of a new roofing system on top of an existing one.*
- *Retrofit may be a superimposition as well, but includes the additional steps of upgrading thermal insulation and perhaps improving drainage at the same time.*
- *Replacement means to remove the existing roof and install a new roof system.*
- *Repair would be those actions that are taken to postpone the day when re-cover, retrofit, or replace-*

ment is necessary.

Most low-slope commercial roofing materials can be easily repaired because, during the initial installation, the plies or sheets were joined together in the field. If we know what’s up there, compatible materials can usually be located and applied.

Is the deck and structure sound or endangered? Can the roof accommodate thicker layers of insulation or a tapered roof system without a major reconstruction? Codes now call for positive drainage, no matter what roof system is selected. In addition, each roof area requires two independent means of water removal.

Bitumen-based materials age in a predictable way. At some point, it will become apparent from the development of recurring leaks that integrity of asphalt-based roofing has been lost and further patching will be fruitless. Although not often seen these days, coal-tar pitch membranes can often be coaxed into lasting longer than asphalt-based roofs.

Since single-ply membranes are factory produced, problems are more likely to be at the field seams or flashings. These are usually simple to fix and will essentially restore the roof’s integrity unless the membrane itself is aged to the point that it has lost its integrity or ability to allow satisfactory attachment.

After a repair, re-cover, or replacement, it’s a good time to evaluate the current roof management program. Is there one in place or is it a “management-by-crisis” situation? If no overall program exists, there’s no time like the present to initiate one, especially if a new roofing system was just installed.

www.serviceworksroofing.com

5423 N. 59th Street
Tampa, FL 33610
P 813-626-7717
F 813-626-7248

3331 NW 55th Street
Ft. Lauderdale, FL
33309
P 954-777-0203
F 954-777-0283

765 NE 19th Place
Unit 9
Cape Coral, FL
33903
P 239-560-6550
F 239-458-2510



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