



Catch small problems before they turn into big ones

The Case for Maintenance, with Randy Dorenbos

We've all heard the phrase, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, yet many of us still postpone small repairs and maintenance tasks. Randy Dorenbos, cofounder of [MD Roofing](#) in Myrtle Beach, S.C., offered a much more persuasive take on the cost of procrastination: "If you don't fix that now," he said, "insurance may not cover it later."

MD Roofing is certified with GAF as both a Master in commercial roofing and a Master Elite® in residential roofing, so Randy has experience on both the commercial and residential sides of the roofing business. Their location means they have seen a lot of storms. "Here in Myrtle Beach, we get hail and wind every single year. It's not even a hit or miss situation."

With the frequency and ferocity of the east coast storms, Randy estimates that any roof older than six or seven years may have experienced some kind of storm damage. That can be caused by anything from hail and wind events that can damage residential roof shingles, to full-blown named storms, hurricanes, and tornadoes that have been known to remove entire low-slope roofs. In either case, the damage from the most recent storm may not be the property owner's biggest headache. Their biggest expense may be repairing damage from a storm years ago that went undetected and unrepaired.

For example, when addressing storm damage, Randy and his team will sometimes tear off a

section and discover the wood underneath is completely rotted out. "The insurance company may still cover the shingles, but not the underlying rotted wood structure," he said. "If I have to redo the plywood on an entire roof, it's difficult to say to an insurance company that rot was caused by a hail event six months ago. Rot takes time."

The materials used in commercial roofing can make it even more difficult to discover underlying or "latent" storm damage. That's one reason Randy finds that the effects of lack of maintenance on commercial roofs may often be much worse than on residential roofs. "Twenty years can go by without anyone even going up to take a look." When issues that should have been addressed immediately fester for a long time, property owners can be caught by surprise when their insurer won't cover this kind of latent storm damage. "The owners are mad at the roofer, mad at the insurer. But they haven't looked at their own roof in 20 years."

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Inspect to protect

Generally speaking, homeowners should get a yearly roof inspection and make recommended repairs right away. But the financial stakes for commercial property owners are usually much higher, so Randy recommends a formal commercial maintenance contract. "Even if you have a commercial roofer go on your roof just once a year, to take pictures and log what they see year-to-year," Randy said, "then it will be easier to establish when damage happens. It also shows your insurer that you're being proactive and helping your roof last longer."

As a certified GAF Certified Maintenance Professional®, Randy basically deals with two kinds of property owners: those who see the value in maintenance right away, and successfully protect their investments, and those who don't. "They just don't want to spend the money," he said. "Then they wait until it's too late."

Those who see the value usually embrace maintenance as the best way to keep small problems from becoming big expensive ones.

When inspecting the roof of a local healthcare center, for instance, the MD Roofing team discovered that surrounding pine trees had dumped enough needles over the years to dam up the building's roof drains. Water had pooled in some areas to a depth of six inches. "If a tree branch, or a piece of flashing from a neighboring house flew off in the wind, and hit that roof membrane, poking even a small hole, all of that standing water would leak into that building. Now, remember it's a medical building," Randy said. "The last thing anyone wants is even a small leak where they can't see it, ruining the insulation or potentially creating a mold issue. It could be a health concern for their patients." Fortunately, regular inspections and cleanings have now kept the drains flowing and the roof clear of debris.

Not all maintenance cases have such happy endings: Unfortunately, MD Roofing has been called in to do inspections for potential buyers of two local properties about five times in the last five years. Each time, Randy said, the sticking point in the sale has been the neglected state of the roof. Yet year after year, the owners chose not to

pull the trigger on the necessary maintenance. Both properties were recently taken off the market, because the mold remediation — caused by the neglected roof — became so cost-prohibitive neither building was worth salvaging.

Pro tip: Keep an eye on your neighbors' roofs.

Randy said one of the best indicators that your roof is ready for an after-storm inspection is activity on other neighborhood roofs. Whether you're a homeowner or a commercial property owner, roofers doing inspections and repairs on buildings nearby is a strong indicator that your building or home may also have taken a hit from a storm and you should get it looked at by a pro.

Tenants have options

As the commercial real-estate market contracts, tenant businesses may have more options. "Most building owners I deal with don't run the businesses inside their buildings," said Randy. "They just own the building. So making sure that small leaks are taken care of quickly is important to keeping your tenant happy. If every time it leaks, their merchandise is getting poured on, or their customers are getting rained on, there are plenty of opportunities for that tenant to just go to a better building down the block."

Conclusion

Commercial roof maintenance may seem like an expense, but it's an essential strategy for managing your life-cycle roofing costs. By preventing small problems from becoming large ones, regularly documenting the state of the roof, and keeping your tenants satisfied, you can help protect yourself and your business from unexpected expenses down the line. It provides better communication with your insurer, and when paired with the right materials, installer, and maintenance professional, may even enable you to [extend the term of your guarantee](#) in certain circumstances.

If you'd like to set up a preventative maintenance program, please visit us.gaf.com/RoofCare



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