

You can forget about ice and snow, but don't forget the damage they can cause

Now that spring, with its warmer weather and balmy breezes, is here at last, you can forget about snow and ice, the damage that they cause, and all the other unpleasant aspects of winter, right? Wrong!

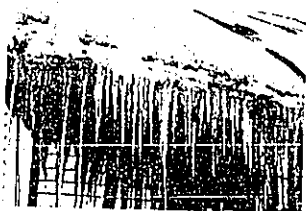
While the problems caused by winter weather may have disappeared, their underlying cause has not and, unless steps are taken before the onset of colder weather, the same problems will probably begin all over again.

Among those cold-weather problems facing homeowners are ice dams, which can cause serious and expensive damage if not checked. And, all too often, the problem is not recognized for what it is.

What is an ice dam? Ice dams are those masses of ice that form along the roof edge of homes. They occur when the heat from the house escapes through the attic and warms the roof, particularly when daytime temperatures are hovering around freezing.

Any snow on the roof will melt and run down to the eaves. Normally, the eaves are colder than the upper part of the roof and will allow the water to freeze.

As the ice dam builds, more water is dammed up, and ultimately backs up under the shingles, leaking down nail shanks and joints into the attic.



Sometimes ice looks nice . . . but there's a good chance that this house has interior water damage that could have been prevented.

Many homeowners mistakenly think there is something wrong with their shingle roof and call on their local roofer to reshingle their home. This expense often may prove to be unnecessary since reroofing alone will not control ice dams.

OVER THE years, people have developed interesting ways of coping with ice dams. Many homes in snow belt areas are built purposely without gutters and downspouts. However, this may cause erosion of landscaping, leading to leakage into the basement or premature wear on the lower portions of the house.

A 4- to 8-inch space between the false roof and the actual one, vented at both ends, allows the lost heat to escape from the structure before it can warm the false roof. Hence, no snow melts and no ice dams are formed.

The use of a false roof is an expensive way to control ice dams but it does begin to tackle the real problem: preventing the escaping heat from melting snow that can freeze to form ice dams.

The first step in controlling ice dams is through better insulation. Obviously, if less heat is permitted to escape into the attic to warm the roof, less snow will melt. The result will be less ice buildup, not to mention the energy savings.

A two-fold approach of insulation and ventilation should significantly reduce the incidence of ice dams. But, for many homeowners, one or both of these steps is not possible without major remodeling. Still, there are other ways to control ice dams.

A second alternative is the use of heating cables to melt the ice as it forms. The cables are usually mounted in a zig-zag fashion along the eave. When the ice begins to build up, the cables can be turned on.

For some homeowners, heating cables are an effective way of controlling ice dams. But there are drawbacks. The

cables increase the use of electrical energy, and they must be turned on and off. If the homeowner is away more than several days, the cables would have to be left on. A final consideration is aesthetics. The heating cables are visible.

ICE BELTS, usually made of aluminum, are another method. However, like the heating cables, ice belts can detract from the appearance of the home.

A permanent solution to preventing leakage has been the use of waterproofing underlayment extending back above the point of any expected ice dam.

And then, of course, there's the snow rake for the back-to-basics crowd. Take a long handle, add plenty of good old-fashioned elbow grease and you're in business. Sounds pretty simple, however, the snow rake can present some unique problems.

If you'll be working from the ground, you'll need a quick pair of feet unless, of course, you don't mind being the target of a mini avalanche.

Either out of necessity or some innate desire to reach new heights, you may choose to work from the roof or a ladder. For this, you'll need the courage of a tightrope walker and the agility of a mountain climber.

Let's hope for an early spring.

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