



Keep a good roof over your head

Most homeowners take their roofs for granted, paying scant attention to the one feature of the home which usually provides long-term, dependable protection for their single largest investment. This neglect often results in damage to the home and its contents and comes as an unpleasant awakening.

To avoid surprises and unanticipated major repairs, homeowners can easily "read" their roofs, which usually give signals about their condition long before they fail altogether.

1. Check downspouts periodically for accumulation of ceramic roofing granules. These are applied to asphalt roofing shingles during manufacture to protect the asphalt in the shingles from the effects of ultraviolet radiation. This causes the asphalt to deteriorate as the shingle ages on the roof.

As the ceramic granules wash from the roof, a vicious cycle accelerates — with more loss of granules. Eventually, the shingles deteriorate, change color and may buckle, curl or break off.

2. When cleaning downspouts, look closely at the shingles. If their color has changed (due to the loss of granules) or if they're beginning to curl or cup, they're showing signs of age. The roof is clearly a reroofing candidate at this point.

3. For those who don't like heights or ladders, a pair of binoculars provide a bird's-eye view from the ground. Look for missing shingles or those discolored or distorted in any way.

If missing shingles are the only problem, a reputable roofing contractor can quickly replace them for you to protect surrounding roof areas.

4. If most homes in your neighborhood were constructed at about the same time and one or more roofs are beginning to fall, check yours carefully. Chances are, it'll be next.

5. To see if water is getting into the home, visit your attic. Inspect the plywood decking overhead. Water stains will show up as dark areas. Extensive water damage will cause the roof's structural support to weaken and may mean costly repairs, so it's best to nip these leaks in the bud.

6. Many roof leaks occur where the roof deck abuts siding; around chimneys, skylights or dormers, or in the valleys where two roof sections form an inverted "V" where water drains down during storms.

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