



Ignorance Isn't Bliss

Get to know some
roofing basics to prevent
unexpected costs

By Lee Thaxton

I often hear stories of how people who own buildings are basically afraid of their roof. I don't mean physically afraid; I mean they just don't know anything about roofs.

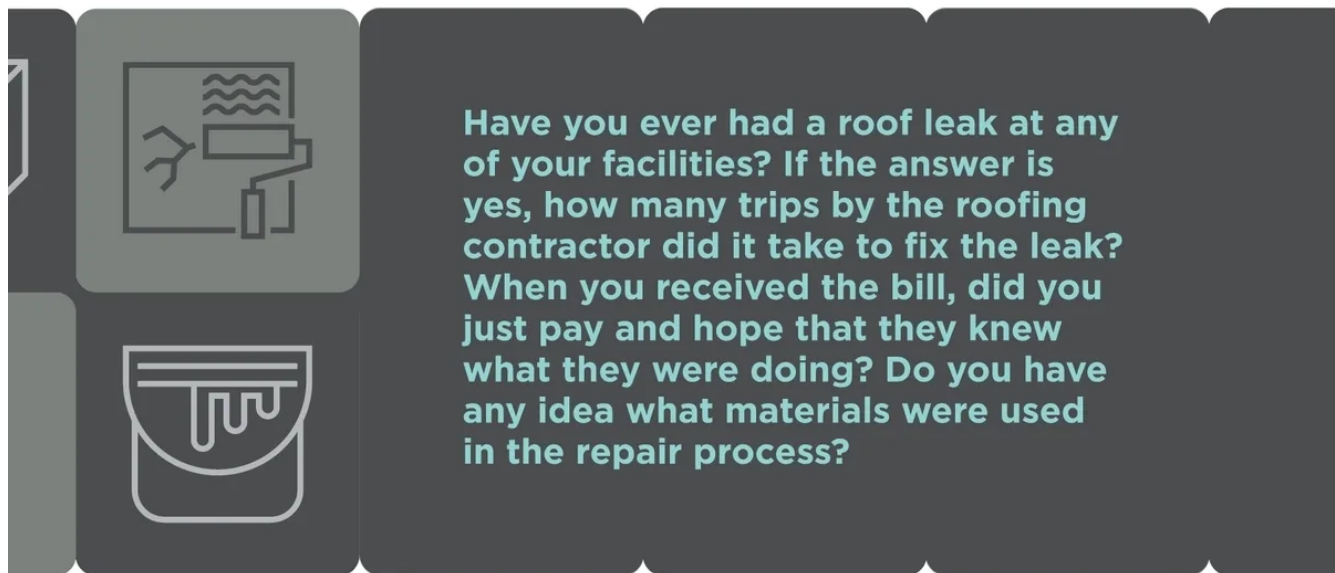
It's funny how we need to know a lot to run our businesses and our daily operations, but when it comes to roofing most business owners are relatively uninformed. While they say ignorance is bliss, in the case of roofing, ignorance can end up costing thousands upon thousands of wasted dollars.

Fixing Roof Leaks

First, let's consider a simple question: Have you ever had a roof leak at any of your facilities? If the answer is yes, how many trips by the roofing contractor did it take to fix the leak? When you received the bill, did you just pay and hope that they knew what they were doing? Do you have any idea what materials were used in the repair process? These are all questions that are important to the future well-being of your roof.

I recently had a conversation with the owner of a 23,000-square-foot building who was troubleshooting a leak on a section of his TPO roof. Overall, it took a roofing contractor five separate attempts at repair to stop the leak. When I asked the owner what the process was to identify the source of the leak and

ISOVECTOR / Shutterstock.com



what materials and processes were used to fix it, he replied the usual, "I don't really know." When I asked if he was confident the issue was fully resolved, he responded with another typical response: "I hope so!" The one thing he did know to the penny was how much he paid the contractor.

This is actually pretty common when troubleshooting an issue on a leaky roof, as major water intrusion can occur as a result of a single penetration the size of a pinhole. This can be something as simple as a weak spot in a welded seam; a rusted-out screw, nail or staple; a deteriorated EPDM washer on a self-tapping screw; deteriorated sealants or one of countless other situations.

I liken the situation to a hole in the tube of a bicycle tire. The hole is often impossible to see with the naked eye, even with a magnifying glass. What's the process to find the hole? Hold the tube under water and look for air bubbles. Similarly, what's the process for most owners to find a leak in a roof? Wait for rain, and see where water comes in. With the way water travels, however, even that process is often ineffective for identifying the problem area.

A Sticky Situation

Now, I know many roofing contractors are well intentioned and really try to do a good job. Facing that type of challenge can be frustrating to say the least, even to a really good roofing contractor. That being said, because roofers are generally up there with no oversight, there is a lot of room to potentially take advantage of the situation.

A good illustration of this was another conversation I had recently with a facilities manager. With millions of square feet in his management area, he obviously had a lot to deal with. I asked about his general process for handling leaks in his management area. His response was, "I have a contract with a roofing contractor in our area. When a problem is reported, he sends a team to remedy the situation. If the materials and labor involved are less than \$5,000, they are

authorized to take the actions necessary to resolve the issue without any additional approval. If it's more than \$5,000, then we evaluate our options." When asked about the process and materials used to remedy the majority of the issues, he again was generally unaware of how most situations were resolved.

Do you see how this could potentially lead to unnecessary expense? A repair here, a repair there. Hopefully it works. If not, we've got plenty of financial clearance to go try again. In this capacity, it is easy to be charged for time or materials that may or may not have been effective or necessary. Again, if you are uninformed, it's easy to get taken advantage of.

Talk to any good roofing contractor, and they will likely have plenty of stories about coming in behind the work of other contractors who didn't necessarily have the owners' best interest in mind when they completed their work.

Knowledge Is Power

You know the challenges associated with the roofing world. What can you do to be more empowered to handle these situations as they arise?

Know your roof!

First off, you need to know what is currently up there. I would suggest knowing the roofing material used, the general process used to install it, the square footage, how many air conditioning units and other pieces of equipment are up there, and how that equipment is attached to the roof. In addition, you need to know if there have been any repairs/patches done. You'll want to know where the repairs occurred and what material and installation process was used. This is important because you want to make sure what is being used is compatible with your main roof membrane and know the longevity you can expect out of the repairs.

Repairs & Maintenance | Roofing Basics



2 Know your options.

Many people are not aware of new roofing solutions being used today to solve big problems in a cost-effective way. Because many rely so heavily on roofing contractors, they may not be informed of options that could save a lot of time and money in the long run. It is good to know of these new options, as well as other traditional options, so you can make informed decisions when dealing with repairs or replacing or sustaining your roof.

3 Have a plan, and create a standardized approach.

It's good to have a roof plan. I like to recommend to people that they develop a standardized approach to handling their roofing challenges. For example, if you know what material is up there and some of the potential options in the marketplace, you can specify what kind of product you will allow on your roof for any future roof repairs.

Alternatively, if you just let roofing contractors install anything they choose to temporarily stop a leak, you can end up with many patches that were done with unknown materials and processes. This is how you end up with a "roof of many colors," so to speak. While this may have worked well for Dolly Parton's coat when she was a kid (a reference from an old country song), it does not bode well for the longevity of your roof.

Often, these patches are just temporary fixes down the road to a future, more expensive problem. In other words, once a patch, only a patch. When the roof wears out and is barely being held together by a bunch of weak patch jobs, ultimately the roof ends up being torn off and the process starts all over again. That could end up costing tens of thousands of dollars or more in repairs and ultimate roof replacement.

Having a standardized approach can extend the longevity of your roof in a big way, so be informed and develop a plan of your own. Whether you have one location or a thousand, having a standardized approach to your roof maintenance can be very helpful. There is no right or wrong approach. Each individual and company can have different ideas and roofing systems. What should be consistent is that they work toward a standardized system for roof repairs, maintenance and sustainability on all their properties.

4 Sustainability enhances profitability.

We all want to do our part and not put waste into the ground. To that end, I would encourage you to look at roofing solutions that not only answer the short-term repair needs but also are sustainable and can ultimately be a long-term system. These types of products and roofing systems are the future. Some of these systems don't even require a contractor and can be installed by just about anyone on your team. These types of sustainable roof systems are much less expensive and don't require that the old roof be torn off. This can save thousands of dollars and prevent the old roof from heading unnecessarily to the landfill.

5 Know that you are in control.

If you learn more about your roof and your potential options, you can dictate how you want your roofing to be handled. Your roof keeps everything else inside safe and dry. These properties and your businesses are too valuable to just leave it up to others to decide how to best protect your assets.

Final Thoughts

I have spent more than 40 years in the commercial roofing business, and I'm here to tell you that you can do this. It's not that complicated. A little upfront work on your part can save you thousands, if not tens of thousands, of dollars in the long run.

The roof is one place every building owner should spend time, as it protects all the assets and operations under it. All too often, the roof gets overlooked until a leak arises. It's kind of like the dentist. You don't ever really think of your teeth until you have a toothache. Prevention, sustainability and standardization are the keys to roofing success for your facilities. ■



Lee Thaxton has more than 40 years of experience in the roofing industry. He is president of Crazy Seal Products Inc., a manufacturer of easy-to-install, sustainable roofing products for all types of flat roofing applications, and owns RV Armor, which specializes in after-market roofing systems for RVs.