



The roof walk: Monitoring and maintaining roofs is an important part of keeping a building healthy

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There's an old saying: "Out of sight, out of mind," which is the worst way building owners can think when it comes to roofing. At Israel Berger & Associates we encourage our clients to be pro-active in monitoring and maintaining their roofs, which is such an important part of keeping a building healthy. I am often hired to do a seemingly simple thing: to walk on a roof. Our clients, building owners and managers, know that, as an expert roofing consultant, I see things - often seemingly insignificant details - that affect maintenance, repair, replacement or other care of a roof, conditions most people would not notice. This is because I understand not just the construction of roofs and how various materials perform, but how a small puncture or loose HVAC panel can develop into a roof leak later. When I walk, I am looking at the entire building envelope: the walls, the coping, the mechanical equipment, the cleanliness of the environment, the HVAC service areas, ductwork insulation and, of course, the roof and parapet surfaces. It serves our clients to have an educated eye reviewing their property. The following instances illustrates where my "roof walks" helped a pair of owners with two different sets of needs regarding their buildings.

One of our clients, the owners of a large, mixed-use complex of buildings in New Jersey, hired us to inspect the roof of the entire site. In this case the site is made up of several towers; one is a 256-room hotel, the three others are office space, all connected by a one-story podium. This low building between the towers anchors the hotel, including its ballroom and meeting room, and encloses a shopping mall and multi-plex movie theatre as well. Altogether the property consists of several hundred thousand square-feet; it was built in the mid-80s. It is a trophy asset for its owners. I walked the roof over a period of two days last April. My process is to observe, to take photos of anything I think is imperfect and to take notes as well. The goal is to identify conditions that would cause water entry, which in turn causes damage; we want to prevent emergency repairs. I am also inspecting for safety: loose panels or loose pads (or anything not secured, in fact) can blow around the roof, causing damage, or can blow off the roof and onto the street below, creating liability for the owners.

Most of my findings were typical of buildings this age and construction: areas that required some repair and patching were almost always at the intersections of roof and wall, or the flashing at roof and HVAC equipment. The most common issues were at areas of flashing, drains, coping or at exhaust fans where grease was accumulating on the roof. Interestingly, even though much of this roof is relatively new (65% had been replaced in the previous 6 years), I still found open seams on the membrane and blisters, both conditions that can cause leaks. In this case I recommended that the owners go back to the manufacturer to pay for the repairs; the roof was still under warranty.

About a month later at a shopping center in Jacksonville, Florida, the owner wanted to replace the entire roof, and asked Israel Berger & Assoc. to help him select the best, most appropriate, roofing

system for the project. Again I walked the roof, but rather than looking for maintenance issues I was reviewing the site, sampling for asbestos to make sure that the removal of the existing roof wouldn't involve asbestos remediation or environmental issues, which would obviously add great cost to the job.

At the N.J. building, the clients received a detailed report with photos of every point of concern, or photos and descriptions of areas that needed attention or cleaning. Our deliverable also included a meeting with the facility engineer where I reviewed all of the points in our report: clogged drains, debris, loose doors, etc., some of which are general maintenance and others are issues of roofing. By investing in my time for a day, the owners know that in a year when we return for a similar inspection there is less chance of being surprised by a major problem.

In Florida, our report was a guideline specification outlining new roof systems that will work at that site and in that region. In a city prone to hurricanes, the fastening system is very important, so we were very specific about fastening. Using our guidelines, the owner has solicited quotes from roofing contractors for the replacement, which we are reviewing for code compliance, materials specifications and for the integrity of the approaches.

Very generally, a roof lasts from 15- 20 years. Warranties ought to be at least ten years, although some will cover up to 25 years. At Israel Berger & Assoc. we help building owners to keep the roofs in good condition, and their properties safe and dry in an efficient way. While we continue to find new ways to monitor roof performance, my roof walks are valuable to clients because they make future maintenance easier and more predictable.

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