OVER MY HEAD

What Every Homeowner Should Know About Replacing a Roof
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The Pacific Northwest lifestyle is the reason many of us live here. The proximity of the outdoors combined with all that a metropolitan area has to offer is a large draw to many of us. With the Northwest lifestyle, however, comes the Northwest weather. Months of rain, wind and snow, with only brief stretches of dry weather can be tough on your home -- particularly your roof. Shielding your home from the elements, your roof receives the brunt of every rain, snow or wind storm. Smart homeowners need to know how to best protect what is often their largest investment when it comes time to re-roofing.

How do you know when it is time for a new roof? If you’ve owned your home without replacing your roof for 20 years or more, it is time to consider having a contractor to evaluate its condition. Reputable roofing companies usually offer a free inspection and bid, so you should never have to pay for this information. If you’ve purchased, or are purchasing, a new home, make sure you inquire as to the age of the roof. But hiring a contractor can be intimidating -- how do you know if they’re trustworthy? How do you know they’re building with quality materials? And why does the price vary so much from bid to bid?

To help alleviate the stress of hiring a contractor -- and to help you know what answers you should be looking for -- the following questions can give you a starting point in interviewing a contractor.

1. What is the quality of the roofing components you use?
2. What should I look for in a warranty?
3. Why is ventilation so important?
4. Can you install skylights?
5. Do you require a deposit?
6. Why are there large price differences between bids?
What is the quality of the roofing components you use?

Re-roofing is an expensive reality of home ownership, and not an expense that homeowners want to pay multiple times. With the kinds of weather we experience, Northwest roofs must be built from superior materials and installed to last. You want your roof to last you as long as possible, so it is important to interview a potential roofing contractor about the quality of materials they use. Those materials are not limited to actual roofing material choices; from tile, metal, composition or shake, all of which are of varying degrees of quality and price.

A credible roofing company will also be able to describe component products that are used on a roofing project. For example, you should inquire what kind of nails are used (or if the contractor is using nails at all). A good roofing contractor will offer hot-dipped galvanized nails, versus regular nails or staples. Galvanized nails are treated through a process which layers a zinc coating over the nail. While they are more expensive, these nails will be much less likely to rust and cause damage to your roof.

You will also have many choices in the materials that are placed between the roof decking and the roofing product, called underlayment. Prior to adding shingles to your roof, a roofer will cover the underlying plywood with felt. If the felt is not thick enough, moisture can seep in and rot your roof from the inside out, as well as cause leaks. Ask your contractor if they use genuine 30-pound felt. Many contractors use what is called “30-pound” felt when, in actuality, it’s only 23-25 pounds.
A final important component of your roof involves “flashing”. Vent pipes in your roof must be sealed with flashing to be completely watertight and protected against the elements. Flashing is also installed in the valleys, gutters, gutter edges, rake edges and on roof perforations such as chimney and skylight edges. A cheaper way to install flashing is to use neoprene flashing. Neoprene tends to dry out and crack over time, which may lead to leaks in your roof. A contractor using high-quality materials will offer lead-pipe venting and baked-enamel flashing, which provides a cohesive and durable form of protection. Ask your roofer whether or not he is using metal flashings. The best roofing jobs will install metal flashings. It is a more expensive option, but better protects against leaks.

The average life span of your roof will depend on the materials you choose.

Examples of roofing products, including cedar shake or shingles, composition, metal, tile, slate and hot tar or “torch down” materials for flat roof systems.
Warranties

Many roofing companies are now offering “lifetime warranties” on new roofs. But, if a roof only lasts, on average, 25 to 35 years, how can these be called lifetime warranties?

When looking into roofing contractors, be sure to ask about their warranty and read the fine print. If the roof has a lifetime warranty, does the warranty cover the next homeowner? If you sell your home, the warranty may expire upon the completion of the sale, or only cover just a few years under the new owner. Most lifetime warranties are non-transferable.

You should also ask your roofing contractor if their installers are covered by manufacturers’ warranties. Materials often have their own separate warranties, and if the installers do not meet manufacturer qualifications, your roof may actually not have a valid warranty; many local roofing installers are not warranty-certified by manufacturers.

Be sure to ask prospective contractors about any restrictions on their warranty, and whether their suppliers have warranties of their own.
Ventilation

Particularly in the Northwest, the proper roof ventilation can make a large difference in the lifespan of your roof and the energy-efficiency of your home. Ventilation, when done correctly, circulates fresh air throughout your attic and reduces the level of moisture inside. Inadequate ventilation will allow extra moisture to build up in your home during the winter and decrease energy efficiency in the summer. This poses a challenge during the particularly rainy Northwest winters: excessive moisture can lead to mold in your home, as well as moss and algae growth on the roof itself, which will shorten its lifespan.

So what’s the right ventilation for you? An experienced contractor should be able to describe the best solution for your home. Because every home presents different challenges, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to roofing ventilation. Ask your roofing contractor about the best intake and exhaust ventilation system for your home. Sometimes, roofers will not install both the intake system and the exhaust system and tell you that you only need an intake system. Although roofs can differ in ventilation needs, all roofs need intake and exhaust systems. The most effective ventilation, in most applications, is a ridge-and-soffit continuous ventilation system, but even these systems can vary depending on your home.
Skylights and Other Interior Lighting Options

The installation of a new roof is when a homeowner should also consider lighting needs in the home. If you have existing skylights, make sure you talk to your contractor. Are they acrylic? Have they cracked or are they leaking? Are the newer energy efficient skylights something to consider installing? If you’re considering installing skylights, be sure to discuss the optimal placement to bring more light into your home.

Tubular day lighting devices, or TDDs, are affordable, high-performance lighting solutions that bring daylight into interior spaces where traditional skylights and windows simply can’t reach. Placed in hallways, closets, entryways or bathrooms, these “light tubes,” bring light to the interior in a cost-effective, energy-efficient way. They significantly reduce the need for electricity while keeping people connected to the outdoor environment.

Ask the roofing contractor if he has the ability to install skylights or TDDs through his company, or if they have to outsource the job. Ideally, your roofing contractor has a carpenter on contract to install the skylights or solar tubes, which will save you time and money. Working only with a roofer with no carpentry training may put you at risk for the job being done incorrectly.
Deposits and Liens

When hiring a roofing contractor, you should ask whether they require a deposit, and if their suppliers regularly send out intent-to-lien notices. Both deposits and lien notifications can be an indicator of the roofing company’s financial stability.

If your roofing contractor requires a deposit before working on your roof, their finances might not be in order. A roof generally takes up to a week to complete; you should ask yourself: Why would your roofing contractor need money up front? Are their finances that tight? Ron Haider, owner of Haider Construction, recommends going with a roofing company that doesn’t require money down. “You can feel confident that they’ll do the job to your satisfaction so they can get paid at the end of the job,” he says. “The bottom line is trust and stability.”

When you hire a contractor, there is a chance that their supplier will mail you an intent-to-lien notice upon the delivery of your supplies. This may indicate a problem with the contractor’s payment history to their suppliers. A supplier can place a lien on your home if they are not paid for their supplies, which may mean an additional cost to you -- you could end up paying twice for the same supplies: once to the contractor and again to the supplier. Ask if your roofer’s suppliers send out intent-to-lien notices for their contracting company. If so, how does the company handle it? Ideally, the contractor will have a good relationship with their suppliers, and intent-to-lien notices will not be issued. If the contractor tells you their suppliers send out lien notices, ask if they will provide you with a lien release before your final payment. This will remove you from any liability from the lien.

Ask for suppliers’ referrals for your contractor. Does your contractor have a good working relationship with their suppliers? Do they pay their bills on time? If not, it may be a sign that the contractor may be in financial straits, and you may have to question if corners are being cut in quality of materials or labor.
Why are there large price differences between bids?

If you’ve determined your wants and needs for your new roof and have approached contractors, you’ve probably received a few bids. Those bids may be very close in price or they may vary widely. There are many options available to homeowners that can dramatically increase the bid you are presented. Now you have to make sense of these varying bids by comparing how they define the scope of the job at the proposed costs.

If there are large differences between the bids, ask for specifics: can they tell you why their bid came in higher or lower?

A lower bid – which may seem like a no-brainer to accept -- may be the bid you should be very wary of accepting. Oftentimes, a low bid means the contractor may not be using quality materials. They also might not have warranty-certified installers, jeopardizing the warranty of your roof.

In general, a contractor should be able to break down where options you choose are going to increase the costs. If a contractor has nebulous answers to your questions, it may be a warning sign. An honest contractor will be able to explain the roofing options that are available, and their contract will clearly detail the component choices they offer.

When considering the bid prices, it’s important to understand that, most of the time, you will get what you pay for. Cheaper bid prices are skimping somewhere, be it on materials or installers. Do not automatically discount a bid just because the price may be higher. A lower bid may mean that you will have to spend money elsewhere, either on repairs after the fact, or on additional, unforeseen costs during the construction process.
Ultimately, before accepting a bid, you should consider all aspects of the project. Realize that this is a time-consuming and labor-intensive undertaking, but if done correctly, should only happen once every 25 years. You should hire a contractor you will trust to get the job done right the first time. Think about what your roof protects: your largest investment (your home), your belongings, and ultimately, yourself.

Finally, go with your gut instinct. If something seems suspicious about your roofing contractor, ask more questions and always check referral sources. Feel confident to ask many questions and get answers. A reputable roofing company will leave a happy customer who will refer them to friends and family.

If you’re searching for a roofing contractor, now that you know where to start, contact Haider Construction and see how we stack up. We’re confident we’ll meet all of your requirements, and are happy to answer any question you may have about your Northwest roof!
Haider Construction Inc., is a licensed, bonded and insured contractor in the State of Washington. Owner and President Ron Haider has over 25 years experience in the roofing and construction business. Our offices are located in Mountlake Terrace, Washington and we serve all areas of King and Snohomish County.

Haider Construction bids on a project only after we have had a chance to visit your site and meet with you personally. Unlike some roofing companies that may present you with a “drive by” bid, we insist on precisely measuring the job, and then meeting with you face to face to discuss your needs and expectations for the project. Haider Construction aims to present our customers with a thorough evaluation of the roofing and/or construction requirements of their particular project. We take that initial bid meeting as our opportunity to educate you about your roofing choices, and the many products and colors that are available. Haider Construction offers a superior experience to our customers with a full guarantee on all our work.