

Minimize roof problems with regular inspections

By Kit Almy

It may be the most important part of the house, but many homeowners feel they're in over their heads when it comes to taking care of the roof. While repairs themselves are best left to the professionals, regular roof inspections can be done by the homeowner.

The reason to conduct regular inspections is because you're more likely to catch signs of deterioration before it causes significant problems, say the experts, who add that such preventive maintenance can definitely prolong the life of your roof.

"It is important annually to walk (around the house) and inspect the roof," said David Fountain, owner of Low Cost Home Improvement, 211 Clarendon. "It's good preventative maintenance."

Since the roof is exposed to all kinds of weather, shingles can fall off in a wind or be torn by ice, therefore, it's somewhat of a "toss up" whether an inspection is better done in spring or fall, he said. For example, in the fall you may find trouble spots and be able to repair them before winter—but since winter is a prime time for damage, it is an equally good idea to inspect the roof before spring rains arrive.

While roofing professionals can inspect your roof, and "there's usually not a fee for an inspection by a professional company," according to Fountain, finding a com-



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Chuck Gladding, of Gladding Building & Remodeling, inspects a loose shingle on a home in Portage.

pany who has time to inspect your roof is the problem.

It's simply not practical for roofers to regularly inspect the thousands of roofs they've installed, explained Chuck Gladding, owner of Gladding Building and Remodeling, 2927 Radcliffe Ave. Because of that, he said, a professional inspection

is usually only requested when a problem is actually suspected, such as leaking water into the home or roof damage after a storm.

When homeowners conduct their own inspections, they should be on the lookout for certain signs. Gladding said that one sign is when there are a lot of granules in

the gutters. "Once [the roof] starts sloughing off granules, it deteriorates faster," he said, because sunlight can get in and cause the asphalt to split and crack.

As Fountain suggested, you can also walk around the house and inspect the roof from the ground, looking for shingles that are missing, torn, or curling (most common with older shingles).

If you are able to get up on the roof safely, check in the valleys and around chimneys for gaps, because those are the areas where leaks are most likely to develop, said Fountain.

Explained Gladding, "Ninety-five percent of leaks are usually around something. It's very hard for a roof to leak in the middle of nowhere," unless a tree limb has punctured it or there's been a bad ice back-up.

Ice build-up may be a sign of poor roof insulation or ventilation. Ventilation is one of the most important things to add for the longevity of a roof, Fountain said, and even newer homes may have poor ventilation.

With no ventilation, or poor ventilation, the attic will be too hot, causing the roof to wear out early, Gladding explained.

Flat roofs are notoriously problematic. Inspect them for cracking and splitting. Some signs will be obvious, said Gladding. If you know a flat roof is eight to 10 years old, it's about due for replacement. Even if you don't see any problems with your roof, there are some things you can do to take care of it.

"In a bad winter, like the past couple of years, make sure to get up there and shovel or rake so that the ice doesn't get backed up," said Gladding. But you have to be careful not to cause damage in the process. "It's better if you don't go up there and whack away," he added.

Winter and ice aren't the only threats to a roof. Keep trees cut back from the house, Gladding said, and if trees drop leaves or other debris on the roof, keep it cleared off to keep moss from growing on the shingles.

Whenever you get up on the roof, whether to clear it off, look around for problems, or try to fix a minor problem, follow basic common sense for safety. "If it's got too much pitch, don't even go up there," said Gladding.

Also, don't even try to get on the roof if it's raining or snowing, he said, and watch out for leaves or mossy areas which might be slick.

Always be careful around the edges, and "walk slowly in case there are soft spots," he said. Finally, if you're not comfortable going up there, don't. The danger of falling is one of the reasons Fountain recommends homeowners turn to professionals for any kind of roof work.

Between the skill and knowledge needed to install a roof correctly and the possibility for falling and becoming seriously injured, Fountain said, "The risk outweighs the cost of hiring a professional."