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A building's roof system is a capital asset which requires care and maintenance

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In today's challenging economic climate, professional property managers are faced with facility maintenance needs under a shrinking maintenance budget. A building's roof system is a capital asset which requires care and maintenance to reach its intended service life and perform to the user's satisfaction. However, unlike parking lots and HVAC systems, roof systems are often thought of as "out of sight and out of mind." Access difficulties can minimize the frequency of inspection and unless the roof is leaking, there is little feedback on the roof system condition.

Similar to an HVAC or paving system, there are components of a roofing system that require regular inspection and maintenance. Roof drainage systems need to be clean and free flowing, rooftop exhaust systems require cleaning and replacement of containment media (especially for a cooking facility), flashings and seams require periodic repair and pitch pocket penetrations require periodic replacement of the filler.

Most troublesome can be overlay roof systems, where two or more systems have been installed over the original roof. In many cases, if the top roof develops a leak, water may enter this roof system and become trapped between the two roofs without entering the building. While trapped, it can be absorbed into the insulation, destroying the top roof's insulating value and structural integrity. This moisture can begin to corrode fasteners and deteriorate roof membrane seams. Mold growth may also be a concern.

Damaging conditions can occur without a leak appearing inside the building. Only a professional rooftop inspection can identify these situations before the roof system is compromised. Infrared surveys can be helpful in problem identification, especially for large roof areas or pre-purchase evaluations.

When developing a roof inspection and maintenance program, several key pieces of data should be collected. The type and manufacturer of the roof system, the date of installation and contractor, warranties, a roof plan, and if possible, an aerial photograph. At the core of the data collection process is a concise roof inspection form. It should contain the date of inspection, inspector name, overall roof condition, specific areas of concern, active leaks, repair history and recommendations for additional repairs. A brief, efficient form is essential to encourage usage.

Aerial photographs can be valuable when noting the locations of roof top equipment, leaks, and problem areas. They can also be used to prepare an accurate roof area plan which may be included in the inspection report. Reasonably priced aerial photographs can be procured via the internet.

The roof system warranty is invaluable, as most roof system manufacturers require the warranty holder to reference that information. Most roof system manufacturers will only accept a request for warranty service if placed by the warranty holder or property manager.

When a service call is placed for a roof under warranty, the roof system manufacturer typically sends a work order to the original installing contractor or the owners designated service contractor. If the leak source is found to be non-warranted, such as a hole, the owner will be invoiced for the work. Often the owner does not understand the limits of warranty coverage and the property manager is left in the middle. Managing the owner's expectations with regards to their warranty coverage should be part of the roof maintenance program.

The person performing the roof inspection should be a commercial roofing professional. A well-trained property manager, roof consultant or a roofing technician are excellent choices. The advantage of a technician is that minor repairs can be performed at the time of the inspection, which will reduce costs.

Typical costs for an inspection, including minor repairs, can range from \$450 to \$1,900 depending on the size, condition and access requirements of the roof. Inspections should be performed annually, bi-annually is preferred. Often, property managers schedule roof maintenance for the fall, after the leaves have come down to ensure drainage systems are functional and in the spring to assess conditions after New England's harsh winter.

Most contemporary low slope roof systems have an expected service life of at least 20 years. A well thought out and implemented maintenance program can help insure the roof will meet or exceed the performance expectations of its design life.

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