

Safety Tips

Snow Removal From Roofs



Removing snow from the surface of your properties' roofs is an important consideration to preserve structural integrity, especially in regions with large snowfall totals and consistent below-freezing temperatures. While this is an important process, there's considerable risk involved with removing snow, protecting personnel, and maintaining your properties' condition.

What To Consider First

Property managers should plan to reduce safety risks for personnel ahead of severe winter weather. Since every property, roof-style, and geographic area is different, it is best to create a plan.

Be sure to consider the following:

- Can snow be removed without sending personnel onto the roof surface?
- What items or areas on the roof could present risks to employees working on the roof? (e.g., skylights, chimneys, changes in elevation, edges)
- What type of fall protection or personal protective equipment should be used by employees?
- What are the maximum load limits for the roof surface? Will the additional snow load combined with the increase in weight from equipment and personnel exceed these limits?

Removing Snow From The Ground

It's best to remove snow without going onto the roof surface, particularly for pitched roof areas. Roof rakes and draglines can clear snow and ice from these surfaces.

The following precautions should be taken:

- When using a roof rake, leave two to three inches on the surface. Attempting to scrape shingles clear of snow completely may damage the surface and pose the threat of future leaks.
- Refrain from using a roof rake or shovel while positioned on a ladder to avoid losing balance
- Ensure that crews and residents are not in the path of falling objects. Create a safety zone that prohibits anyone from standing too close.

Removing Snow From Above Ground Level

Depending on a building's roof height or style, it may be necessary to use personnel on the roof surface to remove snow. Plan ahead for these buildings. One of the primary concerns with this method is the potential for falls from dangerous heights.

Use the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) safety rules for rooftop work. Determine what tools, equipment, and clothing employees will need and what type of OSHA training is necessary before they start. When using ladders or aerial lifts to remove snow, always follow these safety precautions:

- Stay at least 10 feet from power lines at all times.
- Ladders should be placed at a correct angle and have a secure footing.
- Ensure that all individuals using industrial power equipment or lifts have proper training and protective equipment to accomplish the job safely.

Preventing Roof And Equipment Damage

For all snow removal strategies, use caution to prevent damage on the roof surface and roof-mounted components. Failure to protect the roof surface may result in future costly water leaks and decreased life expectancy for the roof structure.

- Use only plastic shovels and snow blowers with rubber or plastic blades to prevent damage to surfaces.
- Determine the location of roof drains, vent pipes, skylights, and roof-mounted equipment to prevent damage to these components during snow removal.
- Avoid making piles or unevenly cleaning the roof surface, as this may put additional weight in a particular section and exceed the roof surface's maximum snow load.
- Ice dams can result from an improperly ventilated attic space and cause significant water leaks in the roof. Address ice damming as soon as possible using a nylon stocking filled with calcium chloride ice melt to create a water channel for drainage.
- Inspect roofs frequently during the winter season to ensure that no damage or uneven leading has occurred.

Contact our Risk Control Services Team

for more resources and answers to your housing organization's risk-related questions.

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