

What's the Risk?

Snow Load



THE ISSUE

Snow load is the weight of snow (generally reported in pounds per square foot) which can vary depending on its water content. A roof or structure can fail if the snow load exceeds the weight the building was designed to support, if it was poorly constructed, or is in poor condition. The depth of snow on the ground can provide a rough indication of snow depth on a roof, but roof snow loads also vary depending on factors such as melting and re-freezing, ice, drifting, roof slope, type of roof, and design features. The amount of weight a roof can safely support is based on local building code requirements.



WHAT'S THE RISK?

Roof collapse due to the weight of ice and snow is a common concern in winter however, it doesn't take a blizzard to cause problems as snow can accumulate over time. Structural deterioration of a roof may support less weight than expected. Also, shoveling or raking a roof without using proper procedures can increase the risk of collapse by creating an unbalanced load on the roof.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Before snow accumulates, know what will be needed to safely remove it from your roof. Consider the following:

- Is this a DIY project or should a professional be called to remove the snow? The combination of roof height, snow, and ice can make this a very physically demanding and dangerous task.
- Can snow be removed without going onto the roof? Whenever possible avoid going onto the roof. Use alternate methods to clear ice and snow while working from the ground.
- Are there any hazards, possibly hidden by snow, that need to be identified (skylights, roof drains, vents)?
- What tools, equipment, protective devices, clothing, and footwear are required?
- What type of protection will be used to prevent falling from the roof?

Additionally

- To prevent unbalanced loading, remove snow uniformly across the roof and avoid making snow piles.
- Never work near electrical lines.
- Leave at least 5 cm (2") of snow on the roof to prevent damaging the roof covering.

