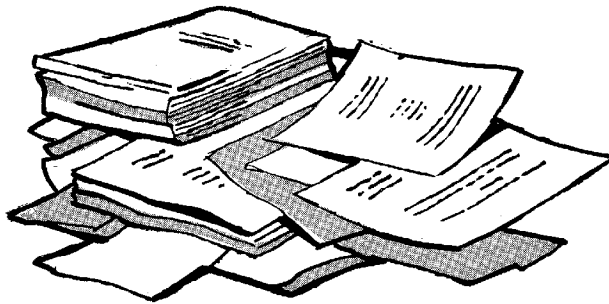


Letters



No Roof Leaks Here

To the Editor:

Congratulations on "Not a Roofing Problem" in the May 1987 issue of NEB. I was patting myself on the back for taking a year to figure out that the ceiling damage near the eaves of a house was not caused by ice dams, but by condensate dropping down the *inside* of the roof. Polyethylene, and bathroom venting go in this summer.

Gregg Shadduck,
Minneapolis, Minn.

Ice-Dam Advice

To the Editor:

Alex Wilson's article, "Ice Dams," (NEB 5/87) discusses the major factors that influence the formation of ice dams, one of which is ventilation.

"Keeping the underside of the roof surface well ventilated," the article says, "is the most important factor you can control." (Emphasis added). Excellent advice. What follows, however, is confusing, and sometimes contradictory and incorrect.

Soffit-only vents will not ventilate the underside of the roof sheathing. With wind perpendicular to the soffits, air flows in the windward side over the attic floor and insulation (and perhaps through the insulation), and out the other side.

When the airflow is parallel to the soffits, it goes in one end in a semicircular pattern and out the other end.

The article goes on to say, "To exhaust the air, use either continuous ridge vents or gable-end vents...Whatever is used, the idea is to allow cold air to flow under the roof surface..."

Again, excellent advice on the use of ridge vents, but questionable—if not bad—advice to call for gable-end vents.

An analysis of airflow patterns shows that soffit vents work independently of gable-end vents, when installed in combination. They are *not* a system. Airflow is over the attic floor where we *don't* want it, and not up under the underside of the sheathing where it should be.

All the houses my company has designed and built throughout the U.S. have roof pitches of 5/12 and many were 4/12. No ice dams or icicles ever formed, not even during three very good ice-dam winters—1978, 1982, and this past winter. This is certainly not an argument against steep-pitch roofs. It is an argument for continuous soffit and ridge vents, which all the houses have.

Snow belts, partial snow removal, heating tapes, valley heat tapes, aluminum eaves flashing—with or without electric heating cables—do not help, nor will they prevent the formation of ice dams.

In every instance, ice dams will form above or next to these devices.

A characteristic sawtooth pattern of the melting snow in the immediate vicinity of the heat cable, and later the secondary ice dam above, are there for the alert observer to see.

We have had a rash of serious ice dams, ceiling damage, and total roof failures in Merrimack. These are caused by: cathedral ceilings without ventilation, or with soffit vents only; roofs with a continuous ridge vents but blocked soffit vents; and roofs with ridge vents combined with drip-edge soffit vents, whose net-free-venting area was totally inadequate.

When all these discussions are over, one thing remains true. With the exceptions noted above, all the ice dams are on houses with gable-end louvered vents.

Eugene Leger
Code Enforcement Officer
Merrimack, N.H.

Bitten on the Bid

To the Editor:

In reference to Sal Alfano's "Bidding Part II" (NEB 6/87), he's right about getting "bitten" by the "match, existing" phrase.

The way we cover our bids in this area is to write "ACAP," an acronym for "as close as possible," and elucidate further by stating "all custom or special order millwork to replicate existing trim will be billed additional." When our clients inquire about the cost of custom moldings, we usually get the go-ahead on the "ACAP."

Keep up the great work!!!

Clifford Ageloff
Estimating/Sales
HomeWorks, Needham, MA

Ventilation Scheme

To the Editor:

Some owners of very tight houses employ air-to-air heat exchangers to reduce levels of moisture, radon, and other pollutants. A cheaper approach is to rely on a steadily running kitchen exhaust fan which, by expelling old air, causes a steady inflow of new air. This scheme, which creates no frosting problems, is now favored by some experts. But have they forgotten that the exhaust-only fan, by reducing indoor air pressure, tends to increase the rate at

which radon from the sub-basement soil tends to flow upward into the house? This tendency could be counteracted by installing a very small fan that would blow air (kitchen air, for example) into the basement, keeping it at slightly above atmospheric pressure.

William A. Shurcliff
Cambridge, Mass.

The Cost of Fire Treatment

To the Editor:

The article on shingle and shake application in your May issue is terrific! It's a pleasure to see a technical story told accurately.

The only statement we might take issue with is with regard to fire-treating "doubling or more" the cost over the untreated product. That used to be true, but with the involvement of more treaters in the business the cost has come down considerably; we now say that it adds up to 50 percent to the cost, which in the total cost of a structure is not a big factor for premium product.

Thank you again for the good handling.

Franklin C. Welch
Marketing Manager
Red Cedar Shingle and
Handsplit Shake Bureau
Bellevue, Wash.

Editorial

Around and Around It Goes

If you look for "On the House," "The Legal Column," "Kitchen and Bath," or several other regular columns this month, you won't find them. They're missing because our computer articles took so much space that they bumped out a lot of other good material. For those of you who want to learn about computers, that's great. For the rest, sorry.

In any case, it's no surprise that computers took up so much space. They have a way of doing that. For example, PC Magazine, which covers just one type of computers—IBM PCs and their clones—comes out 26 times a year and is over 300 pages per issue. What could be so interesting about computers?

Well for one thing, they change often and quickly. Since we started to prepare this issue last winter, IBM came out with a new line of computers that doesn't talk easily with the old, and Apple came out with a new Macintosh computer that can talk with the IBMs. Incidentally, the new IBM will act more like an Apple Macintosh than an IBM—when its new operating system OS/2 comes out. When will that be? Will it run your existing IBM software? Should you buy the old-style IBM or the new? Or a clone? Or a Mac? Read the computer magazines and find out.

On the software side, since we began working on this issue, several of the programs we reviewed announced upgrades, bugs, revisions, and one completely new software series.

Around and around it goes. For the newcomer trying to leap aboard this fast spinning merry-go-round, it can be maddening. As soon as you make up your mind, the picture can change: your computer manufacturer files for Chapter 11, your software vendor scraps his program and starts from scratch.

As Marty King points out in our introductory article, computers do not perform miracles. They can't turn a lousy estimator into a good estimator—or a sloppy bookkeeper into a pro. Many a great company, he points out, has been built without the aid of a single computer. So why bother?

One answer is: everybody else is doing it. You don't want to look old-fashioned to your customers, banks, and associates, do you? Don't you want to spew out impressive looking reports on endless streams of perforated paper?

A more compelling answer is: when all is said and done, computers actually can help you do certain tasks a whole lot better, faster, more accurately, and more neatly. They can be a profound organizational aid—like a desk organizer, file cabinet, calculator, ledger book, and typewriter—all rolled into one compact and convenient package.

If you're committed to learning and using them, computers can help keep the business side of the business more organized. And they can even save you some of that precious commodity—time.

So I think it's worth your while to get a foot in the microcomputer door. Start slowly. Educate yourself. Buy conservatively. The longer the wait, the cheaper everything becomes, so take your time. In time, all the computer gobbledygook will make a certain amount of sense. Some of you will even find you enjoy computers.

We hope you enjoy our special computer issue. Happy hacking. ■

—S.B.