

■ Good Hands® Advice

Tips to help you be prepared and informed



Ice Dams

Ice dams during a Canadian winter may give your home a scenic wintery look but they can be the cause of significant damage to your roof, shingles, insulation, interior walls and personal property. In extreme cases, the structural integrity of your home may be compromised. In either event, prevention is important.

What is an Ice Dam?

Ice dams are the large mass of ice that collects on the lower edge of the roof or in the gutters.

Indications that ice damming may be occurring:

- Snow is melting but there is a line of ice or snow at the eaves that is not draining.
- Formation of large icicles from the eaves.
- Water is dripping out of the soffit or gutter.
- Shingles appear worn or faded on overhangs.
- Shingles have rolling humps or dips on eave line.
- Interior walls or ceilings have visible water damage under eaves.

What Causes an Ice Dam?

Ice damming usually occurs when there is a significant amount of snow on the roof. If the temperature in the attic is above freezing, it warms the roof sheathing which melts the snow lying on the shingles. The melted water flows down to another part of the roof that is cooler – usually the overhang and eaves, and the water freezes. The ice forms a small dam that builds up slowly as more and more melt water refreezes. Eventually, water backs up behind the dam and works its way up under the shingles until it begins to leak through the roof into the living space below.

The problem gets worse as the back log of slush and snow created by the damming forces the shingles up, dislodging nails in the process. Nail holes and small cracks are perfect pathways for flowing water. Water pathways make their way into your attic, seeping through your insulation and migrating into your walls and through your ceiling. The end result is damage to the interior of your home and personal property. These are the obvious effects of leaking as a result of an ice dam. If the leak is not obvious, it may be years before you notice mould or wood rot.

The Four Main Causes of Ice Damming

- Weather
- Household heat escaping to the attic
- Uneven roof temperatures
- Roofing underlayment that water can penetrate

How to Minimize the Chance of Ice Dam Formations

Ice dams can be prevented or minimized by:

- Keeping gutters and downspouts clear of leaves and natural debris.
- Identify areas of heat loss in your attic and properly insulate those areas, including wrapping and insulating heating duct work.
- Ensuring the attic has proper, continuous ventilation under the roof deck.
- Using a snow rake or soft broom to clear fresh snowfall from gutters.

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