

ATTIC AND ROOF

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KEYWORDS

[attic](#)

[attic insulation](#)

[flat roof](#)

[gutters and downspouts](#)

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ATTIC

Attics are inherently dangerous areas of the house and can become extremely hot during certain periods of the day, possibly causing [heat stroke](#) or other health problems if a person is in the attic too long. Individuals should never enter the attic alone or when other people are not present in the house.

Very rarely is the attic and its systems and components fully accessible or visible due to insulation; loose wires; storage; blockage by framing components, equipment, gas and water supply lines; or dangerous or unsafe conditions. There is always the possibility that problems or defects were present but not visible in areas not accessed or not visible; concealed problems or defects are not within the scope of the home inspection.

[Attic insulation](#) typically is installed to help our homes stay cool in hot weather, and to stay warm in cold weather. Insulation does this by minimizing heat transfer by convection and radiation.

[Attic ventilation](#) is crucial to the survival of our attics and roofs. Without proper ventilation, moisture can be trapped in the attic, causing roofing components, and basically anything else in the attic (furnaces, water pipes, gas pipes), to deteriorate excessively. Additionally, any attic insulation loses its insulating capacity (its R value) when it becomes wet; in fact, some insulation when wet can actually become an electricity conductor. During hot periods of the year, lack of proper ventilation can cause the attic to become excessively hot, which can literally burn the roof covering off the exterior roof, causing it to fail and leak prematurely.

In our San Diego climate (11 months of sunshine), without proper attic insulation and ventilation, a five-year roof covering can fail and leak in as little as six months, depending on when and how it was installed. Continue reading for more information about the roof and attic.

ROOF

The roof was observed from ground locations using ladders and binoculars; for two-story structures with no observation points from neighboring properties, this might mean that very little of your roof was inspected. We estimate how much roof we could see and that percentage is in your home inspection report in the Roof sections. Inspectors do not walk on roofs because of the inherent danger to inspector and the possibility of damaging the roof, particularly clay and concrete tile roofs.

Roof problems cannot be adequately determined during dry weather. Roofs are prone to leaking after extended dry periods (typical of San Diego climate) due to weathering, drying, and shrinkage of wood components of the roof.

The [roof drainage](#) system ([gutters and downspouts](#)) helps to keep water away from the siding and foundation, thereby minimizing structural damage and helping to prevent undermining of the foundation and subsequent settling damage (ceiling, wall, and floor cracks).

A lot of us live in San Diego because of the climate. However, it is that same climate that will play havoc with your roof. Here's what happens. When the lumber was ordered for your house, it was what we call "green lumber," having a typical moisture content of 20% or higher. The natural drying process as the house was being built typically causes the moisture content to fall to between 7% and 10%. Now that construction is finished, the house suffers through eleven months or so of beautiful sunshine, as well as hot, dry Santa Ana winds, before it gets to drink up the moisture of about one month of rain. During those eleven hot, dry months, the moisture content can fall to between 1% and 3%, causing shrinkage gaps between wood components. At the same time, the flashing sealant on the roof is drying out, becoming brittle, and cracking. Now the rains come. Leaks everywhere! Yes, the roof and flashing on your house in our climate can fail at any time.

Here's how to [protect your investment](#) without spending a lot of money and without waiting until thousands of dollars worth of damage occur to the interior because of a roof leak. Put in your annual home maintenance budget a couple of hundred dollars or so for a roofing contractor. Every October when you set your clocks back (or any other easily remembered day in the Fall, but definitely before the rainy season), pay a qualified roofing contractor to come out and examine your roof and give it the A-OK (some roofing contractors may also provide warranties against leaks for a year or two). Now you should make it through the rainy season with no problems. And come on, a couple of hundred dollars or so in preventive maintenance for the roof is much, much better than waiting until it leaks and going through the anguish of major damage to the interior and to your furniture, books, pictures, photographs, and other priceless mementoes of you and your family (like your wedding album and your children's baby pictures).

Your roof covering will last a long time in our climate if you'll do three things: make sure your attic has (1) adequate ventilation (e.g., any combination of gable, soffit, static, turbine, and ridge vents; and attic fans), (2) adequate insulation, and (3) give a roofing contractor a couple of hundred bucks or so each year, or toward the end of whatever warranty period the roofing contractor provides you, to inspect your roof and flashing.

Homes with [flat roofs](#) can become excessively hot during summer days, sometimes exceeding the exceeds the cooling capacity of the home's cooling system. A reflective hot surface, typically a white or metallic finish, can be helpful but may not completely remedy the heating/cooling problem. Additional ceiling insulation may also be needed to minimize heat penetration from the flat roof. Additionally, the cooling system may need servicing, or the system may simply be inadequately sized for the dwelling. If you are having problems cooling your home, or specific rooms in your home, consult with a licensed heating and cooling professional.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommend regular homeowner monitoring and maintenance.**
- **Recommend always using caution when in attic.**
- **Recommend annual inspection of attic and roof by a licensed roofing contractor.**
- **Recommend monitoring roof function during and after rainfall and further evaluation by licensed roofing contractor if any problems are detected.**
- **Recommend having gutters and downspouts installed if they are not present.**
- **Recommend cleaning and checking gutters and downspouts regularly.**

LINKS

While HomeTeam endeavours to keep links current, due to the changing nature of the Internet, it is virtually impossible to ensure that all links are active, and HomeTeam makes no representation that they are. If you find an inactive link, please notify us by email at TheHomeTeamSD@aol.com. For links to work properly, you should already have logged on to the Internet with your browser or Internet Service Provider.

Abundance of information about many topics: www.doityourself.com

Roof checkup guide for consumers: www.nrca.net/consumer/checkup.aspx

Roofing knowledge: www.goodroofer.com/roofingcollege.htm

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