Roof Management

Roof/Top/Topics

In This Issue…EPDM Repairs

One of the most common problems on older EPDM roofs is a phenomenon known as "bridging". The top photo shows what a properly functioning wall flashing should look like. The material is tucked neatly into the corner at the junction between the horizontal surface of the field of the roof and the vertical surface of the parapet wall.

As EPDM ages it shrinks. This creates tension within the sheet, which pulls at the perimeter securement. When it fails, bridging begins, as shown in the bottom photo. If unrepaired it will eventually rip wide open. Unfortunately, many owners discover this only when water starts pouring into the building.

So, when bridging starts it must be fixed. The only questions become "when" and "how".

"When" : It isn't necessary to repair wall flashing the first instant that bridging occurs. Generally, when over 50% of the flashing is bridging and some of it is pulling significantly up the vertical surface we will suggest repair. If less than 50% of the wall is bridged and/or the bridging is very slight then the repair can probably wait. If an isolated area of a long wall is bridging badly and the rest of the wall is OK then that area only could be repaired, but generally we recommend always repairing the entire wall at one time. The following section explains why that is.

"How": First, lets talk about how NOT to repair the walls. If the wall flashing has ripped it is not good value to simply put a patch over the gaping hole, yet this is what is all too commonly done. If nothing is done to relieve the tension the roof will continue to tear. We have gone up on roofs where the owner has said that "he needs a new roof because the roofer can't stop the leaks" and discovered that the only problem is that the roofer is doing the repair the wrong way!

The proper way to repair a wall is to cut the wall flashing the entire length of the wall and let the EPDM "relax". This will relieve the stresses present. Then a new "base tie-in" detail must be installed. The base tie-in can be done in a variety of ways, but is designed to hold the perimeter of the roof so it can't move. Then the wall can be reflashed to make it watertight again. It is important to cut the entire wall, otherwise the areas not cut will have a higher stress load placed on them and their failure will accelerate. If interior roof curbs are bridging they should be done when the walls are done.

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