



# 6 KEY FACTORS IN ASSESSING LOW SLOPE ROOF WARRANTIES

Roofing warranties have become more sophisticated, covering more materials and events, and for more years, than ever before.

The reason is simple. With many dollars at stake, manufacturers want to provide building owners assurance that their decisions are solid. Warranties offer comfort that, if something goes wrong, owners won't be left with major repair expenses.

However, as warranties have gotten more complex, stakeholders involved in the process – building owners, consultants and others – may have more questions about what protection these agreements actually provide.

Surely, while the best warranties can never substitute for high-performing roofing systems, they've become important parts of the industry landscape.

Manufacturers brought forward the first warranties in the 1970s, as more single-ply membrane roofs came onto the market. These early offerings were quite limited, applying solely to membrane defects.

Over time, there's been a shift. And, while membrane-only warranties are still available, the industry has shifted to fuller offerings – warranties of roofing systems, which include materials, assembly and labor.

Over the last decade, another important development occurred. As the quality and endurance of building materials improved, the typical length of the agreements got longer.



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Across the industry, as recently as 2008, 10-year warranties were prevalent. Today, they're vastly outnumbered by 15- to 20-year agreements. With 25- and 30-year coverage now available from most manufacturers, the demand for these durations will no doubt increase significantly over time.

Clearly, building owners and consultants believe in the value of warranties. At the same time, they have concerns.

To help address them, here are six key factors to consider when evaluating a warranty:

### **1. UNDERSTAND WHAT'S COVERED...**

While roofing system warranties vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, most are quite similar. With some exceptions, they cover roof leaks originating from the materials installed according to the manufacturer's specifications, typically, without a limit or cap to the repair costs.

### **2. ... AND KNOW WHAT ISN'T**

Warranties protect against damage from normal use and weathering. As a result, they often exclude damage caused by neglect, accident or natural disasters, such as earthquakes, lightning or high winds. Owners should examine the fine print closely. Many warranties don't cover "ponding water," which the industry generally defines as "water which remains on a roof 48 hours or longer." This is vital because the majority of flat roofs, even when installed properly, will end up with some ponding water – it is almost inevitable. Wind events is one area where warranties can differ greatly. Exclusions from standard coverage range from undefined "wind events," to "Gale Force Winds," which can be as low as 32 miles per hour, with some companies covering as high as 60 miles per hour. Depending on the manufacturer, additional coverage – such as for stronger winds or for hail – may be available, but for an additional cost and generally subject to defined system enhancements.

### **3. COMPARE APPLES TO APPLES**

Over the long term, a roof that's appropriate for, say, the Arizona desert might not be right for a facility in New York, with its varied seasonal cycles. If your company is installing a 30-year roof, get a list of similar roofs that are 30-plus years old on buildings in the surrounding region. Don't focus too much on roofs that were installed in the recent past. Pay particular attention to the manufacturer's long-term record in your area.

### **4. DO FURTHER RESEARCH**

Owners should always ask installers about the history of claims made against the roofs they've installed. And then double-check what they learn. Look for red flags. Talk with consultants, other building owners and business colleagues about their experiences



### **5. LEARN WHAT'S EXPECTED**

Even after a roof is installed, building owners are not done. Owners need to know that, for the warranty to remain in full effect, they'll be required to keep up with maintenance. No roof is completely "maintenance free," though some require considerably more maintenance than others. This is also common sense: proper maintenance is the best policy.

### **6. BE UPFRONT**

Over the lifetime of a roof, many building owners modify their roofs. Currently, many are adding solar panels. Doing so without consulting the roof manufacturer will almost always void the warranty. Think ahead. A company planning to do anything on or through the roof's surface should contact the manufacturer's warranty department and discuss these changes beforehand. The same advice applies for owners making major changes in the use of a facility or building additions to it.

A warranty is something building owners want to have, but never want to use.

Even as the duration of these warranties increase in years of coverage, the same principles that applied in the past hold true today.

To get the most value from a warranty, it pays to examine the language of the agreement in advance of the project execution. Owners should understand their own obligations for the lifetime of the agreement and know the conditions covered under the warranty. Also consider choosing a roofing system that requires little maintenance, and a warranty that covers ponding water and provides adequate wind speed coverage.

When it comes down to it, the biggest factors in selecting a roofing system should be the proven performance of the selected roofing membrane and the prior track record of similar systems in your area. Select a manufacturer with a reputation for supporting their products and honoring their warranties.