

Rooftop snow clearing can't meet demand

Deluge prompts hundreds of calls

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Ken Rhinhart of A. Clark Roofing removes snow and ice buildup from a roof on Monday.

Photograph by: Ed Kaiser , The Journal

As the snow continues to fall, home and business owners will want to keep an eye on how much has landed on their roofs.

Edmonton has seen more than 50 centimetres of snow this season, and that has kept rooftop snow-removal companies busy.

Dave Jamieson, a project manager for General Roofing Systems, said his company has been busy since just after Christmas and is averaging 90 to 120 calls each day.

"We're receiving calls from all over and our call volume is up about 500 to 700 per cent, but we can't get to all calls," said Jamieson.

The cost for removing snow from a home is a minimum of \$350, which includes a free estimate. The cost for an industrial or commercial roof will be at least \$750.

Homeowners and companies will also have to cover the costs of workers -- \$79 an hour for residential homes and up to \$165 an hour for commercial or industrial buildings.

Jamieson said the biggest problem is ice buildup forming under the blankets of rooftop snow. With continued ice buildup, a major risk is the formation of ice dams, especially when rooftop vents get clogged.

"Most cases of ice damming are coming from attics that aren't ventilated or insulated properly. When warm air doesn't get out it circulates, condensates and leaks, " said Jamieson.

When the snow begins to melt, the water builds up and turns to ice. It has nowhere to go and wedges itself under the roof. When spring arrives, that ice turns to water and leaks into the house or building.

Not only is GRS fielding calls from worried homeowners, some commercial and industrial buildings have also been asking for the snow on their rooftops to be removed.

On Monday morning, GRS workers were working on a 250,000-sq.-ft. flat-top roof with 20 centimetres of ice buildup. Jamieson said the metal beams supporting the roof have been stressed and structural engineers have been called in to examine it.

Some rooftops have accumulated 30 to 40 cm of snow so far this season, but Jamieson warns owners against climbing up and removing snow because of safety risks.

"They are certified workers that use harnesses, anchors, ropes and specific cleats," Jamieson said in describing the equipment snow removal workers use to ensure safety.

Those who want to take on the task will be hard pressed to find roof rakes to remove the snow.

"We've sold double the roof rakes we sold last year," said Calgary Trail Canadian Tire manager Tony Mercer.

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