

Rental Watch

Dear AON: With winter and the rainy season about to descend upon us, we have heard that October is the best month to take a good, hard look at the condition of the roof and gutters. Why is this true and can you give us some roofing guidelines? G.C.

Dear G.C.: You're right, October is an excellent months to inspect your roof and gutters for wear and tear and water leaks. If you have had a leak problem in the past, it's a good idea not to wait until it rains. Roofing companies become extremely busy during the rainy season and you can avoid a lot of extra interior and exterior damage repairs by planning ahead.

For example, after a heavy rain do you notice black splotches on the wall? You can be fairly certain it's mildew, most likely caused by some sort of roof leak. What typically happens is that water seeps down through the leak in the roof and into the wall, which provides the moisture that is essential for the mildew to grow.

The first thing to do is find the leak in the roof. Even a small leak in the roof can cause substantial damage to ceilings, walls, insulation, electrical systems, flooring and personal belongings.

And, of course, a small roof leak doesn't mean the roof needs to be replaced. A minor defect or deterioration could be the cause of the leak, and it can be easily corrected with an application of roofing tar or a simple patch. Whether the roof needs replacing depends on its overall age and condition.

And with winter around the corner, this is the perfect time to inspect your roof and gutters. This is something you can do yourself if you have the skill to make minor repairs. Just be careful. Make sure your ladder is secure, and wear rubber-soled shoes to prevent slipping. If your repair skills are limited or if you are afraid of heights, you should hire a professional to perform the inspection and make any necessary repairs.

If you do it yourself, look for worn, loose or missing shingles. If you have a flat roof, look for tears, and worn, curled or frayed portions. And take a close look at any flashings, vent pipes, skylights, satellite dishes or any other thing that protrudes through the roof. These should all be in good condition and properly sealed.

On the roof and in the gutters, remove any debris, such as leaves, pine needles and tree branches. You may have to snake out any clogged gutters and down spouts, and make sure there are no leaks in them.

Make any necessary repairs. If it is too much, you may want to consider hiring a professional such as a roofer or gutter specialist.

This information is not intended as professional roofing advice. Please contact a professional for assistance with your particular problem.

Moving Appliances

Dear AON: We own a small rental property and recently one of our tenants did major damage to his kitchen floor when he tried to move his refrigerator. How do I keep this from happening again? S.L.

Dear S.L.: Most tenants have no idea how to properly move an appliance. They just slide it across the floor. If you would rather move the appliance for them, be sure they know it. Otherwise, it would be a good idea to give your tenants a little knowledge about moving them. The reason I am mentioning this is because a tenant may drop something behind the stove or refrigerator. They will slide the appliance out to retrieve their lost item and, when they do, your floors might be damaged.

If you are willing to move the appliance for your tenants, list it as one of the benefits of renting from you. Tenants like to know that you are there to help them when they have a problem. In the end you will save money. The average kitchen floor replacement is over \$400. Will you move their stove to save \$400? Without a doubt.

Remember that every property and situation is different so when making building and/or equipment changes, make sure you know your local code compliance laws, uniform building codes and NFPA safety standards. Always consult with a licensed contractor, building inspector and/or related professional if you have a particular problem. The information contained in this article is not intended as legal advice. Always consult an attorney if you have a particular problem or question.

If you are in need of a licensed, insured contractor or inspector, you might want to call Contractors Referral service toll free at 1-866-769-7523. Contractors Referral has been in the business of referring contractors to property owners for over 36 years.