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## Smart Tips for Prolonging the Life of Your Condo or HOA Common-Area Roof

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In Chicago, there's a six-flat brownstone condo building that hasn't had a roof replacement for more than 25 years—which is a long time for a roof to stay snug—though the recent snowmageddon may end that streak.

Still, the board members believe one key to this condo building's success might be the annual inspection and maintenance plan it signed with a local roofing company for less than \$300 annually. For that amount, the roofers come once in the spring, do an inspection, and do minor repairs as needed.

Here, we ask managers and roofers whether that type of plan is wise and for their tips on other routine maintenance can push [roof replacement](#) further down the line.

### An Annual Plan Works

Signing up for regular inspections and routine repairs is a great start, says Zuly Maribona, LCAM, the Bonita Springs, Fla.-based senior vice president and partner at KW Property Management who oversees the company's southwest Florida, Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, and North Carolina operations.

"Annual maintenance is very common, and we encourage that," she says. "We recommend a [preventative maintenance plan](#) that can include a yearly inspection and repairs of things like broken or damaged materials and mitigation of any exposure to the elements. That includes cleaning the roof, too.

"Those don't have to happen every year," she adds. "But having the roof on a maintenance schedule where that's happening every two to three years depending on the area where you're living can really make a difference."

But let's back up. A [reserve study](#) can really help on the roof-maintenance front. "My first question for associations with a common roof is: Are you using your reserve study?" asks Greg Smith, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, director of leadership development at Associa®, a community association management company headquartered in Northern California. "You should have a tool telling that you have X number of years remaining before a reroof is expected.

"If boards are doing nothing for their roof, they should at least start by following the recommendations of a reserve study," he adds. "The people who do those

studies aren't usually roofers, but they're typically licensed engineers, so they have knowledge that can help."

Maribona agrees. "We always recommend our associations have a proper reserve study," she states. "From a budgeting and [financial management](#) aspect, that'll tell us how long a life your roof currently is expected to have."

## Easy Steps to Stronger Roofs

What, specifically, can you do to [save your association money](#) on your roof by stretching out its life span? There's actually a ton.

"I try to educate people on what they can do," reports Peter Gray, president of Pyramid Real Estate Group, which manages 4,000 units in Connecticut, and a real estate commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection. "The two main things that destroy roofs are the sun and water.

"It's not appropriate for every roof, but for some flat roofs, coating the roof with a reflective surface—which can be silver or white—can reflect the heat away from the roof," he explains. "That can send the UV rays, which are damaging and degrading to roofs, away, and you're not allowing petroleum products to cook.

"So I suggest boards have a professional, who has to be a roofer, coat the roof with an appropriate covering," adds Gray. "It may be overkill, but for the properties I own, I coat a brand new roof. I've found that it also reduces energy consumption by almost a third."

The other roof destroyer, says Gray, is water. "Clean the gutters and make sure roof drains remain clear, free, and flowing," he advises. "Also trim overhanging branches or anything that will cause water to dam. If you don't do that, you can get backflow that gets under the roof into the underlayment and destroys the whole system."

Ami Feller, owner of Feller Roofing in Central Texas, who touts that her team of roofers is 70 percent female, agrees that cleaning debris is wise and advises that it be done twice a year, depending on how many trees tower over the roof. She also recommends placing sealant on exposed nail heads and taking advantage of a newer process for cleaning algae off a roof. "That can drastically change an ugly roof back to a pretty one," she says. "I charge \$.30 per square foot for that softwash, and it prolongs the life of the roof by killing the organic growth that's eating away at the roof."

More best practices:

- **Make sure any inspection actually takes place on the roof.** "Your roof shouldn't be inspected from the ground unless a drone is being used," says Bob Behrends of Bob Behrends Roofing in Colorado. "A roofing professional needs to either physically get onto the roof to look for damage or potential problems or use a drone to inspect the roof remotely. Drones these days are quite affordable and are the next best thing to physically getting onto a roof."
- **Fix minor damage before it spreads.** "Routine roof inspections for specific problems will help you avoid problems and damage before they become more serious or widespread," says Constantine Anest, owner of

Ethos Roofing & Restoration in Colorado. "Watch for rusted or loose flashing and moss or mold growths. Also look for missing or loose shingles and broken, dented, or warped shingles."

Can you repair those minor problems yourself? Maybe, but if you're wrong, it could cost you more in the long run, says Anest. It could also invalidate your existing roof warranty, if you have one.

- **Take extra care after a weather event.** "If you live in an area that's prone to hail storms, after the storm, visually check the roof for hail damage," suggests Behrends. "In an area that gets high winds, after winds have died down, check for loose material."

Shane Tow, vice president of CWC Roofing and Exteriors in St. Louis and Naples, Fla., agrees and stresses the need for speed in conducting a post-event inspection. "Hail storms and damaging wind events can create many issues," he says. "If you catch them early, they might be able to be repaired or tarped before further damage can occur."

- **Don't power wash your roof.** Notice that Feller mentioned a *softwash* process for roofs. Don't let that turn into a power wash. "You're forcing water under the roof where it shouldn't go," says Gray. "Roofs are like lasagna, and you have to be careful so all parts of them work."
- **Consider whether to restrict access to your roof.** "I'm on my co-op board, and we just replaced our roof over the summer," recalls James McGrath, owner of Yoreevo, a real estate company in New York City. "One of the things we discussed was restricting access to the roof altogether. Even if you have a [properly protected and reinforced roof deck](#), inviting people on the roof is going to shorten its lifespan because of all the little things that happen.

"For example, our old roof had a number of bottle caps wedged into it," he states. "Someone's drinking a beer and steps on the cap, and now you have an obvious leak in the works. By simply not allowing any access to the roof, you can extend the roof's lifespan and save a lot of money."