



*The Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
Department of Public Safety*



WINTER STORM TIPS

Public Safety Advisory

Potential Roof Collapses

Dangers Associated With Heavy Snow Loads on Roofs

This message is a reminder from the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Fire Services

The February 8th winter storm that hit Massachusetts presents a variety of challenges. As we approach the new week, it is anticipated that warm temperatures and rainfall may blanket portions of Massachusetts. With the recent heavy snowfall, rain will increase the weight of snow on roofs throughout the Commonwealth. Fire and building services need to plan for the onset of storm related issues.

Flat roofs, lower roofs that meet higher roofs, and areas with parapets or areas of drifting snow are major concerns. Many commercial building owners may hire or bring staff on to clear snow from flat roofs to help ease the burden of additional weight. In doing so, they will also make it easier for fire services to access and traverse these areas in the event of an emergency. In areas of significant snowfall consideration should be given to the additional weight firefighters may contribute on these roofs.

Homeowners, tenants, and businesses should be cognizant of the dangers posed by heavy snow loads on roofs, and the warning signs of potential structural weaknesses. In most instances, risks posed by accumulated snow on roofs may be mitigated by safely removing the snow from roofs of both commercial buildings and homes. As temperatures are expected to rise and fall over the next several days, every effort should be undertaken now to safely remove snow from roofs. Removing snow from rooftops will minimize the likelihood of structural collapse. Flat and low pitched roofs, most often found on industrial buildings, but are also used in certain home designs, are at the greatest risk of buckling under heavy snow and ice accumulations. Lower roofs, where snow drifts or accumulates from higher roofs are also vulnerable.

Tips for Homeowners in removing snow and ice from roofs and other areas

DO's

- Use a snow rake for pitched roofs (available at most hardware stores) to remove snow from your roof.
- Start from the edge and work your way into the roof.

- Try to shave the snow down to a 2 or 3 inches on the roof instead of scraping the roof clean, which will risk damage to your shingles or other roof covering.
- Keep in mind that any metal tool could conduct electricity if it touches a power line and metal tools may cause damage to the roof.
- Shovel snow from flat roofs throwing the snow over the side away from the building. Most plastic shovels are better, except for the ones with curved blades- those too will do some damage to your roof.
- Remove large icicles carefully if they're hanging over doorways and walkways. Consider knocking down icicles through windows using a broom stick.
- Wear protective headgear and goggles when performing any of these tasks.
- Consider hiring professionals to do the job. The combination of heights plus ice makes this one of the more dangerous house chores.
- If you don't hire professionals, at least have someone outside with you in case anything does go wrong.
- Keep gutters, and drains clean, free of ice and snow and keep downspouts clean at ground level.

Tips for Homeowners in removing snow and ice from roofs and other areas

DON'T's

- Unless approved by a registered professional engineer, don't add your weight or the weight of equipment to the roof.
- Don't use a ladder since ice tends to build up on both the rungs of the ladder and the soles of your boots.
- Don't use electric heating devices like hair dryers or heat guns to remove snow and ice.
- Don't use open-flame devices to remove snow and ice.