

PREVENTING WINTERTIME ROOF COLLAPSE

Few parts of the United States are immune to the potentially devastating effects of cold weather. Heavy snow and freezing rain can cause roof collapse with terrible consequences. Employees, customers and innocent bystanders can be injured or killed. Interruptions can be expensive or financially disastrous to a business. Damage to buildings, equipment and inventory can be a significant expense. There is also danger from electrical lines, gas lines and processed piping that may come crashing down along with the roof. If this happens, your sprinkler system will cease to function just when you need it most.

Even if you are in an area that rarely experiences severe winter weather, your potential for damage may be even greater as your building and surrounding structures may not have been designed to handle large winter storms.

If your building has survived severe winters with heavy snow accumulations, don't assume you're safe. Has the building been modified in any way? Has additional equipment been installed on the roof or attached to the underside of the roof structure? This may increase the load the roof must support and may increase the risk of roof collapse. Is the building being weakened by age, decay or corrosion due to the interior or exterior environment?

Protecting Your Business

Here's how to protect your business:

- When completing periodic building inspections, keep in mind the extreme stresses placed on your building in the winter.

- Check roof scuppers, drains and down spouts for blockages due to debris and ice before and throughout the winter.
- As winter progresses, check for excessive snow and ice buildup. Any change in roof elevation or contour are potential problems because snow and ice tend to accumulate at these points. Also check canopies and surrounding structures.
- If safe to do so, reduce snow accumulations. Employees should not go on the roof to do this work unless they are equipped with the proper safety equipment and follow all fall protection requirements. You may need to contract this work out to a local professional.

If Disaster Strikes

Your disaster preparedness plan should anticipate such things as a roof collapse. In the event of a collapse, follow these steps:

- Treat the injured and call for medical assistance.
- Immediately contact local authorities, including police and fire departments.
- Shut off gas, electricity, process piping and water in the affected area.
- Contact local utilities.
- Contact the Sentry claims department for assistance.
- Contact local contractors to arrange for shoring or immediate repairs.
- Protect exposed stock and machinery from further damage if it's safe to enter the area.

Cold Weather Tips

- Clear snow and ice from around emergency exits so they are accessible in case of an emergency.
- Protect piping and equipment from freezing by maintaining adequate heat in all areas of the building (40° F minimum).
- In unheated areas, remove all liquids that can freeze from piping and equipment. Antifreeze solutions or UL-listed heat tapes may be a safe alternative.
- Have the heating system checked by a licensed heating contractor prior to winter.
- During extreme weather, maintain a watch over critical buildings and processes or provide reliable electronic monitoring.

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