

# Dramatic Changes Seen in Asphalt Roofing Shingles

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Asphalt roofing shingles have changed dramatically over the last few years as the industry continues to consolidate. Celotex, Globe, and ELK, once popular shingle brands, have all been acquired or are no longer manufactured. Meanwhile, many familiar brands are significantly lighter in weight, and the warranties for all asphalt shingles have undergone a total transformation over the last 3 years. Also, many manufacturers have stopped publishing the weights of their shingles, and almost every architectural shingle warranty starts with the word lifetime. Calling for a 260-pound shingle or a 30-year warranty is pretty meaningless and probably won't get you the product you were hoping for.

## Rising Prices

Although weights have dropped, the prices for all asphalt products have risen significantly. The cokers installed by many refiners allow them to refine oil in ways that have changed the oil/asphalt dynamic forever. Asphalt flux is a major component of asphalt shingles, and the use of cokers means there's less flux left at the end of the oil refining process, resulting in higher costs to the shingle manufacturer.

In response, many suppliers have created asphalt shingles that rely on creative designs and color blends to achieve an architectural look, instead of adding layers and weight. The new shingles look great and are more cost-effective, and the lower profiles are easier to flash. These shingles use less asphalt and less fuel for shipping, making them a "greener" alternative.

Efficient contractors have responded to the increased cost of asphalt shingles by using techniques that use "scrap" shingles throughout the roof. Cutting loss is particularly easy to minimize with laminate shingles.

New construction and existing home sales are rebounding, but they remain well below peak levels of 2005. Discretionary reroofing remains flat. As a result, storm-related reroofing now represents a greater percentage of the roofing market. The unpredictable nature of extreme weather events makes it much harder for manufacturers to anticipate demand, often resulting in severe regional shortages of asphalt shingles.

## Installation Tips

Innovative mat technologies have inspired some suppliers to dramatically reduce the weight of their shingles. Although all brands are backed by similar warranties issued by highly reputable manufacturers, there are a few things to consider when installing the lighter shingles.

- The thinner shingles will telegraph deck and underlayment imperfections more than the heavier shingles. It is important to follow best practices by leaving a 1/8-in. gap between all edges of plywood or oriented strand board. (An 8-penny nail placed between the sheets when decking will provide the gap). Don't simply rely on plywood clips to provide the spacing.
- Underlayment must lie flat or the buckles will telegraph through the lighter shingles. Synthetic underlayments are more forgiving than traditional asphalt saturated felt. Not only will synthetics lie flatter, they will resist tearing and blow-offs. Some of the new synthetics have incredible walking traction when they're both wet

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and dry. If you haven't tested the walkability of some of the newer underlayments, you're missing an opportunity to provide a much safer roof environment for your workers.

- The lighter shingles may be less likely to seal down. All manufacturers have responded by engineering a more aggressive sealant, but it is more important than ever to nail the shingle correctly. This means placing the nail below the seal strip on three tab shingles, and through the common bond area of all laminates.
- One of the more confusing developments has been the coevolution of two similar-looking but very different strips located on the headlaps of some shingles. Some laminate shingles have a nailing tape on the headlap, while others have replaced the course granules with fine granules on a strip just above the exposed area of the shingle. Although the strips look similar, the tape helps the shingles lie flat *and* can be used as a target line for nailing, while the fine granule strips were designed to help the shingles lie flat in the bundles and on the roof, and should not be used as a nailing guide. The bottom line is to *always* nail through both layers of a laminate shingle, through the common bond area.

## Flashing Tapes

Another area of improvement is the availability and effectiveness of the various flashing tapes now on the market. Ice dam products are designed to be repositionable. This means that they won't aggressively stick to walls or skylight curbs without the use of adhesives.

The newer flashing tapes are very aggressive, even in cold and slightly damp conditions. When installed before the metal flashing and integrated with the underlayment, they provide superior protection at the critical roof and wall interfaces.

Some suppliers have done a commendable job of developing Ice Dam products with superior traction, dry or wet. I strongly suggest that every contractor experiment by walking on samples of several synthetic underlayments and ice dam products, and then choose ones for safety. The first rule of fall prevention is "don't slip," and this is one simple way to "engineer out the hazard" when working on steep roofs!

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