

Clearing the Hurdles to an Attic Ventilation Upgrade

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New ventilation products on this home were installed as part of a roof replacement completed by Ameritech Services, LLC, Deptford, New Jersey. Photo: Larry Deyo, Ameritech Services

The best time to evaluate and improve the residential attic ventilation system is during the installation of a new roof. Access and installation are generally easiest at that time, so a re-roofing application is an ideal time to fix existing problems and/or increase the airflow in an under-ventilated attic. But just because the roofing contractor determines the attic ventilation system needs a fix does not mean it happens.

We asked roofing contractors who have attended our best practices in residential attic ventilation seminars this question: What keeps you from upgrading the attic ventilation system during the installation of a new roof?

Other than roof or house construction obstacles such

as certain types of framing, incorrectly added house additions, or vaulted ceilings that are incorrectly insulated, here are the common hurdles — and suggestions to overcome them — from roofing professionals across North America.

HURDLE: “We’ve Never Had Ventilation, So Why Now?”

Many homeowners will challenge the roofing contractor who points out that the attic does not have enough ventilation — or any ventilation at all — if it’s been that way for a long time and there aren’t any noticeable problems. They reason that there’s nothing to fix.

“They typically say, ‘Well, it has been like this forever, why does it need to be changed now?’” says Clayton Putman, commercial project manager, Elite Roofing, Denver, Colorado.

Such comments are rooted in a reluctance to make an unnecessary purchase. “Customers do not want to pay for something they didn’t think they needed before and do not think they need now,” says Dale Johnson, project manager, HomeZone Improvements, Grand Blanc, Michigan.

Tips for Clearing this Hurdle: “I have trained our team to discuss the benefits of updating the attic ventilation system and count on them to present the information to the customer well,” says Putman. Here are some talking points to help overcome the hurdle of homeowners not wanting attic ventilation they previously never had or needed.

- **Just because there are no obvious signs of trouble does not mean all is fine.** *Has anyone checked inside the attic to see the condition of the underside of the deck and the attic insulation? Any signs of mold or condensation buildup? Are there any signs of premature shingle failure?*

- **The house may be more airtight than in past years and will benefit from improved attic ventilation.** *Since buying this house have there been energy-efficiency upgrades such as new windows, doors, or insulation? If so, the*

house does not “breathe” as easily as it did previously. Tighter houses benefit from attic airflow to remove heat buildup in the warmer months, moisture buildup in the colder months and fight ice dams in snow climates.

· **Your new roof will meet current standards.** *The full terms of the warranty that comes with your brand-new shingles is tied to proper attic ventilation. Current International Residential Building Code specifies the amount of attic ventilation needed and your attic does not meet those numbers. Even if the local municipality does not enforce building code, you’re knowingly paying for an inferior roof.*

HURDLE: “You’re too Expensive.”

Good luck to the roofing contractor who is thorough, diligent yet considered too expensive compared to the other contractors who have submitted estimates to the homeowner. While price certainly should be evaluated, there is more to a roof estimate than just dollars.

“Very few contractors look at attic ventilation as an important factor in a new roof, so they do not include it in their estimate; and most of the contractors think there is a one-size-fits-all solution. As a result, their estimates are less expensive than mine,” says Matt Cooper, general manager, Redemption Roofing, Conroe, Texas.

Is less expensive better?

“Homeowners question my reasoning for additional attic ventilation since most other contractors do not mention the need. The homeowners almost feel as if I am trying to take advantage of them rather than make their roof ‘system’ a best practices/optimal operating one,” says Sabrina Johnson, president, KDCO Home Improvement Inc., Akron, Ohio.

Not understanding the overall project contributes to the price objections from homeowners. “Improperly educated customers make it challenging to upgrade the attic ventilation system,” says Greg Pike, project consultant, Campo Roofing, Twinsburg, Ohio.

If homeowners understood that all the exhaust vents in the world on their roof are useless without proper intake vents, perhaps price concerns would be reduced. “The main cause that prevents me from upgrading is the homeowner not wanting to pay for improved intake ventilation,” says Richard Turner, owner, R.J. Turner Remodeling, LLC., Winston Salem, North Carolina.

Tips for Clearing this Hurdle: “I will explain the importance of proper attic ventilation and provide documentation (brochures, website links, etc.) detailing why adding intake ventilation is critical,” says Turner. Here are some talking points to help overcome the hurdle of homeowners who believe the roof estimate is over-priced because the contractor included proper attic ventilation.

· **Make sure we’re comparing apples to apples.** *A roofing estimate without intake and exhaust vents is not the same as a roofing estimate with a balanced system of attic ventilation. Those are two very different roofs that will deliver very different performances. I’m recommending a complete roofing system for longevity.*

· **Your new roof needs attic ventilation to perform properly.** *Anyone can install a roof covering. I'm installing a roof system that includes balanced attic ventilation to fight heat buildup in the summer, which will lighten the burden on your air conditioning system and improve the comfort in the living space. It will help fight the moisture buildup inside the attic from the 2 to 4 gallons of water vapor the average family of four generates indoors daily by occupying the house (cooking, cleaning, laundry, perspiration, breathing, etc.). And in snowy climates, attic ventilation helps keep the roof temperature fairly even so that ice dams are reduced.*

· **Our company has a great reputation.** *I'm not sure why the other contractors did not mention attic ventilation, but they should have. Our company always does because it's needed for a properly installed roof. We've been in business here locally a long time and enjoy a solid reputation. We stand behind our projects which includes a comprehensive estimate for an entire roofing system.*

HURDLE: "I'm Selling the House Soon."

For the homeowner who is selling the house soon, spending money on the property for anything viewed as non-essential is a red flag. "People selling their home will not do anything they view as 'extra' like attic ventilation," says Sue May, owner, A Better Way Construction and Roofing, LLC., Lincoln, Nebraska.

Tips for Clearing this Hurdle: Broaden the conversation to include the perspective of the potential buyer of the house. Here are some talking points to help overcome the hurdle of homeowners not interested in attic ventilation upgrades because they are selling the house.

· **Your potential buyer will be looking very closely.** *I understand you're selling the house and want to avoid any unnecessary spending. Someone will be buying your house and wants the best value for the money. If the potential buyer does not catch the lack of proper attic ventilation, the home inspector hired by the buyer likely will. You can avoid that possibility by addressing the attic ventilation deficiencies now. Otherwise, be prepared to negotiate with the potential buyers why your attic is incorrectly ventilated and how that will impact the selling price.*

HURDLE: "Insurance Will Not Pay for It."

A storm-damaged roof is being replaced and covered in price by the homeowner's insurance policy but the cost to upgrade or improve the attic ventilation system is not. "If insurance will not pay for the upgrade, the homeowner will not either," says Bryan Epley, former senior director of business development and sales, Gen 3 Roofing, Centennial, Colorado.

Tips for Clearing this Hurdle: Many roofing contractors will either arm homeowners with the needed information to get the insurance company to pay or will write a letter to the insurance company on the homeowners' behalf. Here are some talking points to help overcome the insurance policy hurdle.

· **Let's change the insurance company's mind.** *Let me get this right: Your insurance company is willing to pay the cost for a new roof — which is a significant purchase totaling thousands of dollars — but will not cover the cost of a needed attic ventilation upgrade, which is a small fraction of the cost of the total roof. We're going to help the insurance company to reconsider. First, check your insurance policy for any "code upgrade" language. You're about to get a new roof. If it's not installed according to today's building code standards, tell the insurance company. Second, the full terms of the warranty for your new roof are tied directly to proper, balanced attic ventilation. You*

don't have proper attic ventilation. If we don't upgrade your attic ventilation system, your insurance company will be paying for a new roof that has a reduced warranty. Third, the official representing organization of asphalt shingle manufacturers, ARMA, says point blank in its technical bulletin for residential roofing: the roof needs balanced attic ventilation. Let's pass that along to the insurance company.

Willing to Walk Away

For many contractors, there is no insurmountable hurdle to upgrading the attic ventilation during a roofing project because they refuse to take the roofing project otherwise. For them, there's no other option. It's mandatory if the homeowner hires them. They are unwilling to put their company name on a roofing project knowingly done incorrectly. And if this requirement by contractors to upgrade the attic ventilation causes them to lose the project to other contractors, they're fine with that.

"Our company will not do a roof without making sure it's vented correctly," says Jeffrey Heitzenrater, president operations, Triple Peaks Roofing and Construction, Inc., Olmsted Falls, Ohio.

"Nothing prevents me from upgrading," says Sean Jegen, owner, Gorilla Exteriors Contracting LLC, Shawnee, Kansas. "I tell the homeowner these are mandatory improvements and if we don't do them the shingle warranty is affected."

"We always do it right or we don't do it," says Chris Arrington, vice president, Arrington Roofing, Dallas, Texas.

To the quality-conscious contractors in business for the long haul, doing it incorrectly just to make some profit is not worth the risks that could be lurking around the corner: callbacks and a damaged reputation.

"Contractors need to be smart and know when to walk away from a job to avoid getting wrapped up in a possible mold remediation or shingle failure claim," says Jeff Barnett, Barnett Roofing and Siding, Inc., Canton, Michigan.

"We always upgrade," says Sandra Daffer, owner, Hawaiian Built Roofing, Boise, Idaho. "It's automatically in our bid if it's needed. If the roof is a good one for ridge vent, then we go that route. Otherwise, we'll pursue other venting options."

"We will not upgrade to a ridge vent if the homeowner won't upgrade an insufficient intake airflow system for balance," says Corey Ballweg, owner, Mid Towne Construction, Inc., Cross Plains, Wisconsin.

"We check for proper attic ventilation on every roof replacement we do. We upgrade if needed, or we refuse to do the job," says Trevor Atwell, owner, Atwell Exterior Services LLC, Greenville, North Carolina.

"We always upgrade the attic ventilation system," says Patrick Readyhough, president, Pond Roofing Company, Inc., Fairfax, Virginia. "We include it as part of our whole roof system,"

Turn the Tables in Your Favor

Some contractors who take the hard stance of refusing to do the roof without upgrading the attic ventilation separate themselves from their competition in a positive way that actually leads to more business.

“Many times, we are hired because we make it a point to show the homeowner attic ventilation is needed,” says Heitzenrater. “All shingle manufacturers’ warranties that we deal with point out there is no warranty after a specified time unless there is proper attic ventilation.”

“After I teach the homeowner the importance of attic ventilation, nothing prevents me from upgrading the ventilation system,” says Ron Bastian, owner, Bastian Roofing, Richfield, Wisconsin. “Both in the summer and winter the homeowner clearly understands the benefits they will acquire by me doing their roofing project.”

About the author: *Paul Scelsi is marketing communications manager at Air Vent Inc. and leader of its Attic Ventilation: Ask the Expert™ in-person seminars (www.airvent.com). He hosts the podcast “Airing it out with Air Vent” and is the chairman the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association Ventilation Task Force. He is the author of the book, *Grab and Hold Their Attention: Creating and Delivering Presentations that Move Your Audience to Action*.*



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