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Roof Coatings: New Set of Specification Questions

The language of roof coatings seems to be changing. Increasingly, amid comments about heating loads and reflectivity, manufacturers are encouraging maintenance managers to view a roof coating not only as a repair option but also as another type of roofing system. Now, manufacturers hope the change in language will lead to a change of thinking among end users.

Applying a roof coating has been viewed as painting the roof. They are not viewed as roofing systems. The way managers in institutional and commercial facilities view roof coatings is certain to receive more attention in coming years because managers, often focused on initial cost in specifying coatings, are incorporating sustainability into their specification decisions.

A roof coating can be a retrofit for almost any system, and it can have the same life as a new roof. This is an alternative to a new roof.

Focus on Cost

Until sustainability entered the conversation, the initial questions from most managers in the market for roof coatings were somewhat predictable and basic.

Before, they would ask, "How long will it last, and how cheap can it be?"

Performance life also dominated the conversation.

They would ask, "Can it be renewed, and what do I have to do to maintain it?" Now, managers are more likely to ask about a coating's solvent content and its impact on the environment.

Sustainability has drawn even with cost even though managers have significant budget issues, particularly in this economy.

One challenge for manufacturers is to help managers find the connection between roof coatings and green issues.

Sustainability is a strong suit of roof coatings, since they can be re-applied every 10 years to extend a roof's performance virtually indefinitely.

Roof Coatings: Advanced Formulations Improve Durability

First, though, manufacturers need to dispel myths and fill information gaps among some customers.

For example, manufacturers say they are working to clear up the misconception of coatings as temporary measures to address roof leaks.

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Customers will say, "I don't want a Band-Aid on my roof." The myth is roof coatings don't last, and they don't solve customers' water leaks.

Manufacturers point out formulation changes for coatings in recent years that have extended the performance lives of many products. But they know coatings have their limitations.

There is no miracle in a bucket that will make a roof that is in disrepair perform well. To ensure a roof coating delivers the expected performance, energy savings and life-cycle extension, managers and roofing contractors first must make sure the existing roofing system is sound.

Green Benefits

Once managers have access to accurate information, manufacturers believe they will be able to make smarter choices, both for their organizations' bottom lines and for the environment.

Elastomeric acrylic roof coatings offer a variety of benefits when it comes to sustainability, from life-cycle extension to improved energy efficiency and a strong bottom-line ROI. They eliminate the need for tear-offs, reducing landfill waste. They are easy to apply and maintain reducing labor costs.

They reduce cooling loads, along with the associated energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Incentives being offered by federal, state and local governments and utilities make the ROI even more attractive.

Manufacturers say that perhaps the strongest evidence they have in making the case for roof coatings and sustainability are the cooling benefits of white, light-colored and reflective coatings.

White coatings cool the building considerably. They can significantly lower the cooling load and reduce the stress on the building.

Roof coatings also can affect the amount of materials going into landfills.

There is no tear-off. They can leave the old roof on, and they've saved on the polluting debris that used to go into landfills.

Finally, many coatings have few, if any, volatile organic compounds.

There is no reason to put a coating with solvents on a roof today.

Manufacturers also know that today's customers often need hard data to make the case within their organizations to justify the cost of applying a roof coating. There is software and other resources to quantify the potential savings.

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Roof Coatings: Pay Attention to Green Claims

As managers pay greater attention sustainability, manufacturers are expanding their offerings to meet what they hope will be growing demand.

The growth of high-performance electromagnetic, acrylic coatings — with specific products to coat virtually any type of low-slope roof and many types of steep-slope roofs — has given managers new and improved options for enhancing the sustainability of their buildings. Elastomeric acrylic roof coatings are suitable for most roofing system types, since specific products are available for coating EPDM (ethylene propylene diene monomer) and asphaltic roofs, as well as metal roofs.

As they move through the research phase, managers will need to pay close attention to the varying green claims by manufacturers. In some cases, it will require them to read product labels to better understand their options.

Managers need to carefully review material safety data sheets and product information for coatings under consideration. The central issue is the way coatings fare based on ASTM testing methods. The standard is [ASTM D6083, Standard Specification for Liquid Applied Acrylic Coating Used in Roofing](#), which covers testing and material properties of water-dispersed coatings composed of a water-based acrylic latex elastomeric emulsion polymer.

That final factor — tear resistance — is a reminder to managers that no matter the coating they select, post-installation inspection for wear and damage ultimately will play a large role in determining the success of any coating.

Managers know they have to perform maintenance, as with any product or system. What happens, though, is the roof becomes part of the 'out of sight, out of mind' mentality. It's easy to do that.

Roof Coatings: Online Calculators Quantify Energy Savings

More than ever, maintenance and engineering managers need hard data when making the case that a certain type of roof coating will bring both bottom-line and green benefits to their organizations.

Facility managers are asking for specific information about how cool-roof solutions can qualify for incentives. One of the better sources is www.dsireusa.org.

The Web site houses the Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency (DSIRE), a comprehensive source of information about state, local, utility, and federal incentives and policies that promote renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Online calculators can help managers quantify the energy savings benefits of reflective roof coatings on a specific building. Two such resources come from the U.S. Department of Energy —

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www.ornl.gov/sci/roofs+walls/facts/CoolCalcPeak.htm — and the Energy Star® program —
www.roofcalc.com.

The roofing calculator estimates annual energy savings for typical building types with non-metallic-surfaced roofs using typical weather conditions. Actual savings differ based on building design, building operation, cooling and heating equipment, and local weather.

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