



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF FIRE SERVICES
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
MASSACHUSETTS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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ROOF COLLAPSE & SNOW REMOVAL SAFETY INFORMATION

Residents and Businesses are Strongly Encouraged to Have Snow and Ice Cleared from Roofs

FRAMINGHAM, MA – In light of the recent back-to-back snowstorms, including this past weekend’s heavy snow accumulation, and the potential for more snow and/or rain in the future, property owners, managers and tenants are strongly encouraged to have snow and ice cleared from roofs before another storm hits the area, exacerbating the risk of roof and/or structural failure and damage from ice dams.

Homeowners, tenants, and businesses should be cognizant of the danger posed by heavy snow loads on roofs, and the importance of recognizing the warning signs of potential structural weaknesses. In many instances, the risks posed by accumulated snow can be mitigated by safely removing snow from roofs. Flat and low pitched roofs, most often found on industrial buildings, but also used in certain home designs, are at the greatest risk of buckling under heavy snow and ice accumulations. Snow on roofs, particularly around gutters and soffits, also may contribute to ice dams and damage from water leaking into walls, ceilings, insulation and other areas.

To safely remove snow from roofs, the Massachusetts Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Department of Fire Services (DFS) and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) recommend the following tips:

DO

- Use a snow rake for pitched roofs (available at most hardware stores and home centers) to remove snow from your roof.
- Start from the edge and work your way into the roof.
- Try to shave the snow down to 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 all ladders, shovels and roof rakes away from utility wires.
- Plastic shovels are usually best. Metal tools may cause damage to your roof.
- Shovel snow from flat roofs throwing the snow over the side, away from the building.

- Remove large icicles carefully if they're hanging over doorways and walkways. Consider knocking down icicles through windows using a broom stick.
- Protect gas and electric meters and piping from falling snow, icicles, and melting water.
- Wear protective headgear and goggles when performing any of these tasks.
- Consider hiring professionals to do the job. The combination of heights and ice makes this a dangerous household chore. If you choose to do the task yourself, have someone outside with you to assist.
- Keep gutters and drains clean, free of ice and snow and keep downspouts clean at ground level.

DO NOT

- Do not add your weight or the weight of equipment to the roof.
- Do not use a ladder since ice tends to build up on both the rungs of the ladder and the soles of your boots.
- Do not use blow torches, open-flame, electric heating devices, or heat guns to remove snow and ice.
- Do not try to remove ice or icicles from utility wires or meters. Call your utility company for assistance.

How to Recognize Problems with Roofs

- Sagging roofs
- Severe roof leaks
- Cracked or split wood members
- Bends or ripples in supports
- Cracks in walls or masonry
- Sheared off screws from steel frames
- Sprinkler heads that have dropped down below ceiling tiles
- Doors that pop open
- Doors or windows that are difficult to open
- Bowed utility pipes or conduit attached at ceiling
- Creaking, cracking or popping sounds

What to Do if You Have Problems

- If you notice any signs that you have a problem with your roof, or suspect a gas leak, leave the building immediately without touching light switches and call 9-1-1 from safely outside the building.
- For general questions, call your local building or fire department business line.

Ice Dams

- Ice dams can cause major damage to a home or building. Ice dams occur after a heavy snowfall, followed by a period of cold weather. An ice dam is a wall of ice that forms at the edge of the roof, usually at the gutters or soffit. When it forms, the water backs up behind the ice dams and creates a pool of water which can leak into your home and cause damage to your walls, ceilings, insulation and other areas. Ice dams are caused, in part, by poor ventilation causing a temperature differential on the roof surface. To learn more, see the [Preventing Ice Dams](#) article from University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Other Safety Tips for Homeowners

- Clear snow away from furnace and dryer exhaust vents to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure you have working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on every level of your home.
- Clear snow from fire hydrants near your home or business.
- Clear snow from storm drains near your home or business to prevent street flooding.

To receive emergency information on your smartphone, including severe weather alerts from the National Weather Service and emergency information from MEMA, download the *Massachusetts Alerts* free app. To learn more about *Massachusetts Alerts*, and for additional information on how to download the free app onto your smartphone, visit: www.mass.gov/mema/mobileapp.

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