



ARTICLE SERIES  
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## ROOF INSPECTIONS: HOW SAFE IS YOUR ROOF?



Roof problems are not always obvious – let’s face it, you don’t often get up on your roof to check it, if at all. Besides, your roof may be hard to access, or you’re not even sure where to look. So you may not be aware that damage has occurred, or issues are building up.

Problems, if not addressed early, can become expensive. Remember that a roof is at its best at the time of installation. From then on, it is subject to the physical elements and age.

While a good roof is designed to withstand the forces of nature, and shaped to efficiently shed rain and snow, the impact of winter storms and extremes of temperature can take its toll over time. So it stands to reason that you need to keep it maintained.

There are some common trouble spots. By identifying these areas, and dealing with them quickly, you can avoid more serious problems of cracking, rotting and leaks that can penetrate the house and cost you big money.

### Common Roof Problems

Some of the most common roof issues we come across include:

#### Moisture and Roof Leaks

The most difficult weather element to control is water. Rain, hail, ice and snow can all result in moisture forming under the layers of your roof, which can lead to leaks and mould.

For this reason, a metal/lead flashing is placed over junctions between roofing materials and the building construction, to deflect water away and form a barrier against water seeping into the house.

Flashings also seal the areas where vents, pipes, supports or cables penetrate the roofing materials. If the flashing is not well sealed or is poorly attached, then leaks can occur. Seams can open up and tiles can blow off. One of the major causes of roof problems is a fault in the flashing.

#### Roof Fixings becoming loose and/or dislodging

Temperature changes can cause normal movement in metal roofing. Movement, however, can also result in roof fixings becoming loose or dislodging. If fixings require maintenance or repair, this work should be carried out by a licensed plumber.

On tiled roofs, mortar (also known as pointing) along hip and ridge tile edges can become loose and cracked, so need to be checked regularly. Where there are loose ridge/hip tiles, these should be re-bedded and re-pointed, and cracked tiles should be completely replaced to avoid moisture getting into your home.

#### Moss and Lichen growth

Roof tiles, particularly terracotta tiles, are prone to moss and lichen growth. This can make them very slippery, so you should avoid walking on them in damp conditions. The lichen can also cause the tiles to become more porous, though this does not generally damage the tiles.

It is probably more of an aesthetic choice as to whether you want the lichen cleaned from the roof. Some people find the mossy look more in keeping with the character of older houses, while others prefer a cleaner look.

#### Deterioration of Roof Membrane

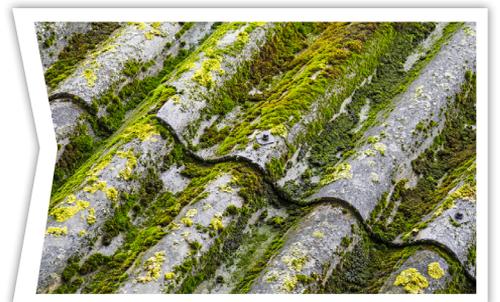
Some tiled roofs and all metal roofing have a shiny membrane laid directly underneath called ‘sarking’ or ‘sisalation’. This membrane acts as an insulation and helps to deflect condensation down into the gutters. Over time, the membrane can deteriorate and become porous, cracked or ripped, which can lead to bigger problems.

#### Soffits and Fascia Boards cracked or rotting

Eaves are made up of the fascia and its associated partner, the soffit. The soffit is the underside of the roof overhang. The fascia is the part of the exterior trim to which gutters are usually installed.

The fascia boards can be highly susceptible to moisture, often as a result of blocked and leaking gutters. They can also suffer from a lack of sunlight, which can cause mould and mildew.

In houses built prior to the 1980’s, there may be asbestos in the soffit or eaves lining sheet. For more information on asbestos, how to take precautions and minimise the risks, check out our other article, “What’s All the Noise about Asbestos?”.





### Ponding Water

Water that ponds or settles on your roof is a sign that there is a problem somewhere and it should be investigated. Likely culprits could be an air conditioning unit overflowing, the roof frame shrinking and creating a hollow, or where people may have walked on the roof and dented the metal ribs.

### Gutters which are rusty and leaking

All gutters need to be cleared of dirt and rubbish. Debris, such as leaf litter and silt, can get trapped in the gutters, and this can create acidic moisture leading to rust and water overflow.

Box gutters are formed where two or more sections of the roof meet. If the gutters are not deep enough to carry a heavy load of water, they can easily overflow and cause water leaks to ceilings inside the house.

Trees that are close to the house should also be trimmed back away from the roof as much as possible. Not only do overhanging tree limbs create a build-up of leaves, but the limbs themselves can also cause problems if they break.

### Faulty installation and poor workmanship

Unfortunately, faulty installation of the roofing material and poor workmanship can cause problems with your roof at some point. While these issues can be difficult to see visually, they can lead to future problems, such as premature aging or failure of the roof system. A professional inspector can tell you if your roof has been installed correctly.

### Lack of maintenance

Roof problems can be addressed with routine inspections and proper maintenance. Be aware of the kinds of issues that can arise and seek the assistance of specialists if you need a qualified assessment. Remember that a roof is one of the most expensive parts of a home, and minor problems can become serious damage if they are not corrected early.

### Bushfire Ready

To keep your home safe, it is crucial that you prevent sparks and burning material from gaining access. Most homes ignite when sparks or burning embers blow under roof tiles and start burning roofing timbers. While metal roofing offers more protection, it must be firmly secured and sealed.

Your best protection is to ensure all gaps in the external roof area along the ridge cap gutterline and fascia board are well sealed.

With corrugated iron roofs, make sure there is sealing in the flute spaces at the fascia board, either with fibreglass insulation or scribed flat metal.

Tiled roofs need an appropriate fire-rated insulation (sarking) immediately below the tiles.

Make sure too that you clear any leaves and combustible debris from gutters, roofs and downpipes regularly, and fit quality metal leaf guards. This may help fire from taking hold or spreading.

### Roof Inspections

Most people will not want to carry out a roof inspection on their own, particularly if you have no idea what you are looking at, and would prefer to keep your feet on solid ground.

As with any inspection process around the home, it is in your best interest to engage a qualified professional. They know what to look for and the kinds of issues that can arise. They are also familiar with the relevant building regulations.

SPI Property Inspections can carry out a roof assessment as part of our overall building condition inspection. Our inspector will compile a report that documents each of the items covered in the inspection and their relative condition. Any faults/issues that we identify will be highlighted and supported by photography. We will also put forward our recommendations for your best course of action.

If the condition of your roof is a concern, or you are just wanting to maintain your investment, contact us at SPI Property Inspections. We can give you our professional advice and put your mind at rest. Catching an issue early might save you the cost of a complete roof replacement. Phone us today on 1300 721 032.

