



# INSIDE GUIDE TO HIRING A PROFESSIONAL SNOW REMOVAL COMPANY

BY JEFF JOHNSTON

*This man is breaking up ice with a rubber mallet on a log home at the base of the Mary Jane ski area in Winter Park, Colorado (elevation 9,052 feet), where the average annual snowfall is 450 inches.*

## READ THIS GUIDE AND DISCOVER:

- When should roof snow be removed?
- Five costly misconceptions about roof and ice dam removal
- Five disastrous mistakes to avoid when choosing a roof snow removal company
- Three steps to having roof snow removed properly

## CHOOSING A ROOF SNOW REMOVAL COMPANY ISN'T EASY

Chances are, if you own property in snow country, you have needed snow removed from your roof on occasion. Unfortunately, many contractors who remove snow from roofs are not properly trained, while others are just downright dishonest.

Often what is portrayed as a "roof snow removal company" is merely a group of guys with business cards and a truck. They have no clue how to properly remove snow from roofs without causing damage. And forget about having current liability and workers' compensation insurance.

This fact-filled guide describes how to find the right contractor to remove snow from a roof, how to avoid being ripped off, and how to determine when to have the snow removed. Finally, it explains how to not be a victim or be liable for damage to the roof or injury to a worker.

Nightmare stories about roofs being ruined, accidents occurring, and workers injured by untrained, ill-equipped, uninsured contractors are a fear shared by most building owners.

If, after reading this guide, you have any questions about roof snow removal, please call an established company dedicated to proper snow removal. They will most likely help however they can.

## WHEN TO HAVE ROOF SNOW REMOVED

Trying to figure the weight of the snow on a roof can be subjective, as drifting or newer, wet snow can dramatically increase the snow weight on the roof. Continual monitoring of the building's specific roof snow conditions is recommended. Here is a suggested way to analyze a roof's snow weight.

**Basic Calculation** (for a quick analysis only). This calculation uses 25% moisture density, which may be conservative. As a rule of thumb, saturated snow weighs about 20 pounds per cu ft. The moisture content can range from 1% to about 33%, so snow can weigh from 1 to 21 lbs per cu ft.

$$(S) \times (1.25) = P$$

S = Inches of snow on roof

1.25 = Weight of 1 sq ft of snow for each inch of depth

P = Pounds per sq ft

**Example:** A roof has 20 in of snow.  
(20 in) x (1.25 lbs/sq ft) = 25 lbs/sq ft

Any ice buildup on the roof should be added. Use 5.2 lbs for each inch of thickness.

Roof snow load can be checked by weighing 1 sq ft of snow cut from the roof. This will determine if the snow load is getting close to the design roof snow load.

Flat roofs, patio covers, drifted snow areas, and ice buildup can be high-risk areas that increase the weight per sq ft. These conditions may justify pursuing snow removal.

The roof drainage system should be checked to ensure it is not frozen or clogged with slush or ice buildup, potentially dramatically increasing the weight. Continually

monitor the roof's snow conditions and have a plan in place to address snow removal, if needed.

Be aware of the potential dangers of shoveling or raking snow from a roof. This kind of work is best left to professionals.

## FIVE COSTLY MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT REMOVAL OF ROOF SNOW AND ICE DAMS Wait as Long as Possible Before Having Roof Snow Removed

Never. Roofs are rated for maximum weight loads, and they should never be tested. It is recommended that once roof snow load has reached 50% of capacity (maximum load), the snow should be removed.

## The Only Reason to Remove Roof Snow Is Because of Its Weight

Although it is very important to have snow removed from roofs to prevent problems because of the weight of the snow, there are other reasons as well.

When the sun melts the snow on the roof during the day and freezes at night, it causes ice to form on top of the snow. Snow



*Photo 1 – Workers remove snow from a building at the base of the Steamboat Springs, CO, ski area, where the average yearly snowfall is 480 inches and the elevation is 9,080 feet.*

that accumulates on top of the ice can cause roof avalanches to occur. Pedestrians should not walk under or near a roof that has accumulated snow after a sunny day.

Also, if ice dams are occurring, snow should be removed to allow the ice to melt naturally.

### **Snow Removal Companies Have Roofing Liability and Workers' Compensation Insurance**

No. Companies that are reputable, experienced, and have been in business for a while know the importance of carrying the proper liability and workers' compensation insurance. They take the necessary steps to ensure their clients are covered in case an accident occurs. On the other hand, fly-by-night companies think that insurance is not necessary, and if an accident occurs, they shut down and move on.

If an accident occurs while work is being performed and the contractor does not carry current liability and workers' compensations insurance, the building owner's policy will be responsible for any losses. If someone falls and gets hurt, the owner will be responsible for the worker's medical



*Photo 3 – Men work to remove snow from a steep roof at the base of the Vail, CO, ski area, where the average snowfall is 300 inches and the elevation is 8,022 feet.*

bills, loss of pay, etc.

Prevent this by insisting that a current Certificate of Insurance is sent to you by the contractor's insurance agency prior to work proceeding. This will answer the important question: Do you have current liability and workmen's compensation insurance?

Beware: Unfortunately, quite regularly, a contractor will instigate an insurance policy and request a Certificate of Insurance from their agency. Once they get the certificate,

they cancel the policy. When a homeowner asks for proof of insurance, they present the "certificate" they received from their insurance agency (certificates show insurance is in effect for the period of the policy: usually one year), while, actually, the insurance was canceled a week after it was initiated.

Prevent this by insisting that a current Certificate of Insurance be sent to the building owner by the contractor's insurance agency.

### **Having the Right Equipment Is All a Company Needs**

Not true. Many companies own shovels, ropes, and ladders; but very few companies teach their employees how to use these tools properly. This is why it is important to choose a roof snow removal company carefully.

Unfortunately, possessing ladders, shovels, ropes, and harnesses and setting out to "take the snow off the roof" doesn't always end there. Often, along with the snow, they also take or damage shingles, ballast, or even membrane and possibly cause other damage to the roof, such as damage to gutters and creation of leaks. Just because someone has the equipment and the manpower does not mean he has the know-how to remove the snow and ice properly.

Your best bet is locating a trustworthy company and then staying with that company.

### **Any Honest Roof Snow Removal Company Should Be Able to Give an Accurate Quote Over the Phone**

We wish this were true, but it isn't. Honest, reputable roof snow removal companies never price roof snow removal over the telephone. Instead, roof snow removal is usually priced by "time spent." A "ball-park" figure estimate can be given, based on "like" roofs in the area. Exact costs are next to impossible to come by.

Alternatively, an owner can set a predetermined dollar amount of work to be accomplished. For example: "I want \$600 of work to be performed on my roof."

To give you an idea of how our company estimates the cost of removing snow from roofs, we consider three things:

1. Size of roof
2. Depth of snow
3. Difficulty of removal



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Beware of contractors who give an exact price to remove snow. They may be giving a “bait-and-switch” price, offering a low price to get the job, then halfway through or at the end, charging a higher price.

### **DISASTROUS MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN CHOOSING A ROOF SNOW REMOVAL COMPANY**

#### **Choosing Not to Have the Snow Removed From the Roof**

Owning property in snow country requires maintenance unnecessary in warmer climates. Roof snow removal is one of them. It is imperative to monitor the depth of roof snow regularly and to make sure there is not too much weight on the roof.

The easiest way to determine the weight of the snow is to

1. Measure the square footage of the entire roof.
2. Measure the depth of the snow on the roof.
3. Cut out 1 sq ft of snow from the roof.
4. Weigh the snow.
5. Do the math: (total sq ft) x (height of snow) x (weight of snow) = weight of snow on roof

#### **Choosing a Low-Price Company**

Proper roof snow removal is a service that involves not only specialized training but also a lot of physical labor. Low-price roof snow removers are a huge warning sign because they are an indicator of untrained (low-cost) people doing the work, and/or no valid insurance is in effect. This means a high likelihood that the roof will be damaged, and if so, the owner and his or her insurance company will have to pay for the repairs.

#### **Choosing a Company That Provides a Current Proof of Insurance Directly From the Insurance Company**

A roof is a costly asset to repair or replace. Make sure the company that removes the snow from it is fully insured. Equally important is to verify that the company has insurance to cover accidents and injury to its employees; otherwise, the owner or the owner’s insurance company will be paying.

All it takes is a phone call to the contractor’s insurance agent to have both certificates of insurance sent. If the company refuses to do that, then don’t do business with it.

#### **Choosing a Company That Lacks Proper Training and Experience**

It’s an unfortunate reality that many businesses “claim” to do things that they really don’t know how to do properly. In this case, if one is not being honest about the service one is providing or the skills one has, that person will probably damage the roof. Play it safe by hiring a company that has been in business for years, not days, and one that has a good reputation in the area.

#### **Choosing a Company That Doesn’t Offer a Guarantee**

Any reputable company should guarantee all of its services. The contracted work will be safely and properly performed and should be completed to the owner’s satisfaction.

Necessary precautions should be taken by the company to prevent damage to the roof. Use of plastic shovels, not removing all of the snow (leaving a few inches), and using proper safety equipment are just a few of the requirements an owner should insist on.



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### THREE STEPS TO HAVING ROOF SNOW REMOVED PROPERLY

Take these three steps to have the snow and ice professionally removed from a roof:

#### Step #1

Make a commitment to get the roof snow removed properly. The longer roofs remain with heavy amounts of snow, the greater the risk of damage to property or people.

#### Step #2

Ask specific questions. Here are 13 questions to ask a roof snow removal company before its workers start work on a roof.

1. How long has the company been in business?
2. What method of roof snow removal do you recommend?
3. What are the steps that you will take when removing snow?
4. Where do you put the snow that is removed from the roof?

5. Do you clear sidewalks and driveways if snow is placed on them?
6. Do you have any references?
7. What kind of shovels do you use?
8. Do you remove all of the snow?
9. How do you remove ice dams?
10. What precautions do you take when removing ice dams?
11. Are you liability and workers' compensation insured?
12. Will you have certificates of insurance sent/faxed to me?
13. Do you guarantee your work?

#### Step #3:

Once you're satisfied that you're working with an honest, competent, professional, hire the company to remove the snow from your roof. Do not pay any money until the job is completed to your satisfaction. 

#### Jeff Johnston

Jeff Johnston founded The Roofing Company in Granby, CO, 35 years ago. The company has always dealt with mountain roof applications, severe weather conditions, and major ice dams. The area gets an average of 350 to 450 inches of snow each year. To find out more, visit the company at [www.theroofingco.com](http://www.theroofingco.com).

