



NEWS RELEASE

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Be aware of heavy snow load on roofs

Back-to-back storms create extra stress, especially on flat roofs

RICHMOND, VA – The unprecedented snow load on roofs in Virginia has led to some building damage and collapse. According to reports from several localities, schools, churches, commercial and residential buildings, carports and awnings have been affected.

As the next in a series of winter storms moves into the Commonwealth, property owners and residents should be aware of the weight loads that these storms may be creating, especially on flat roofs.

Take the following precautions to protect life and property:

- Watch for falling snow and ice from roofs.
- Don't put untrained individuals on roofs to clear snow. Falls from roofs and possible exposure to electrical wires while on the roof are serious hazards.
- Inspect roofs for leaks or structural deficiencies that may develop during the storm.
- Make certain gutters, drains and downspouts are clear of ice and debris.
- Clear snow and ice away from exhaust vents that go through exterior walls.
- Clear decks of snow to reduce stress on them.

After the storm:

- Clear areas around downspouts so that water from melting snow has a path to flow away from the house or building.
- Have a professional licensed contractor remove all snow immediately from every roof surface, including roof overhangs and covered porches.
- Remove snow from side walls to prevent high snow mounds from pushing them in.
- Temporarily shore up and brace dipping or sagging roofs or walls.
- Improper operation of doors or windows, deflection of ceiling finishes or exposed beams, roof leaks or sprinkler heads moved from their normal positions could be signs of roof failure.

Also consider that barns and other agricultural out buildings could present safety hazards. Be careful when entering such buildings and in deciding about housing animals in them. If you are concerned about the structural integrity of a building, contact a structural engineer, building inspector or other qualified individual. Consider moving out of the building if appropriate.

Owners and residents of flat roof buildings in particular are urged to be aware of the possible snow load danger. The threat from heavy snow weight will remain for some time after the storm ends because cold temperatures expected for the rest of the week won't allow much melting to occur.

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Note: This information was gleaned from several sources, including the Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs and the Maryland Emergency Management Agency.