



# Roof Cleaning Safety Tips

by Neo Johnson

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The roof cleaning industry has grown exponentially in recent years as homeowners have become more aware of the fact that their roof algae stains can be removed. This expansion has attracted many small business entrepreneurs who see it as a potentially lucrative endeavor. All too often, though, this rush to earn money results in a roof cleaning service that has not laid the groundwork for safe procedures and operations. These owners and operators would be wise to lay out some basic safety tips for themselves and their employees before anyone even steps foot on a roof.

First and foremost, the most obvious risk associated with roof cleaning is the potential for a life-altering or life-ending fall. Many people wrongly assume that only two-story roofs are dangerous, but there are countless people who die or are paralyzed by falling from single story ranch roofs every year. If you land on your head it doesn't take much height at all for there to be disastrous consequences. Navigating a roof is particularly dangerous when a cleaning is in progress because there are slippery chemicals and hoses to contend with.

To protect yourself from falling you should work with a safety harness system whenever possible to act as a "safety net." You should also invest in a pair of roofing shoes that are designed for maximum grip and slip resistance. I personally recommend the Cougar Paws brand. You'd also be wise to hold your trigger gun in one hand while holding chemical line slack in the other to avoid tripping over it. In addition, always make sure you're moving in a forward direction and not backward. I've had a few close calls while moving backwards and tripping over vent stacks or other roof obstacles. Finally, leave yourself a dry path to exit the roof, otherwise you'll be dealing with slippery chemicals as you attempt to walk down to the ladder and mount it. You can spray the path with chemical behind you during your final exit.

Ladder safety is a topic unto itself. You'd be wise to use a ladder standoff device at all times, not only to protect the homeowner's gutter but also to stabilize the ladder during your ascent and descent. Also make sure that a helper is at the bottom of the ladder to help keep it stable while you're climbing it. In

addition, try to extend the ladder at least three or four feet above the gutter line so that it will be easier to mount it from the roof surface upon job completion. Finally, if you can afford it, try to purchase ladders that don't conduct electricity. Many a roof contractor has been injured or died as a result of accidental power line contact.

Last but not least is the issue of roof cleaning chemical exposure. No matter what product or solution you're using, some of it is bound to come into contact with your skin or mucus membranes and you need to be prepared for this. Always wear goggles, a NIOSH-approved mask, and heavy-duty gloves. I realize that roof work can be very hot but if at all possible it would be wise to wear a long sleeved shirt and long pants to protect your skin from chemical splash. Also, on windy days it's inevitable that chemical mist will find its way onto your neck, ears, ankles, and other exposed areas so try to carry a dry rag or towel with you so you can wipe it away as

the need arises. The last thing you want to do is allow the chemical to sit on your skin for extended periods of time. If it's a big job take multiple breaks so you can climb down and give your face and skin a good rinse with the garden hose. Taking breaks is just a good idea in general because roof work can be very hot and you need to replenish your body with cool water whenever possible. The last place you want to experience heat stroke is forty feet off the ground on a slippery roof.

Those are some basic safety guidelines that you'd be wise to employ if you have your own roof cleaning business. If you're not spending as much time preparing for safety as you are for profits then you're setting yourself up for fall (in more than one way). Lay out clear rules for yourself and your people and make sure they are adhered to. Every other aspect of your business comes a distant second.

*Neo Johnson is an author for the Guide to Roof Cleaners and Services.*

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