

Ice Dam Removal Services

by Henry Bockman



During the blizzard of 1994 in Maryland, thousands of homes and commercial properties dealt with damages from heavy accumulations of snow, which caused a large number of roofs to collapse from the weight of the snow. At the beginning the concern was the amount of weight on the roofs, but that quickly shifted to ice dams as the snow started to melt and refreeze.



You can see a video of how ice dams form here: <http://www.henryshousework.com/what-causes-ice-dams/>

What Is An Ice Dam?

An ice dam is a buildup of water that is formed from melting snow on the roof, then runs down the slope of the roof and forms into ice near the outside wall of the house. This is usually at the soffits where there is slightly cooler air, because it's located past the heated areas of the home, and where cooler air is drawn into the attic from the vents in the soffit. It may only be a difference of one Degree but if temperatures are low enough, that's all that's needed for the water to freeze.

Through constant fluctuations in temperature, a wall of ice is formed across the roof and water begins to build up behind it. Once the pond of water behind the ice dam is deep enough, it starts to back flow into the exterior walls of the house. Ice dams are usually formed very slowly, so it may take a day or two for the water leaking into the walls to be noticeable, but when this happens it can cause water damage to the walls and ceilings of every floor of the house below it.

Ice Dams are not the only thing that can cause damages!

As I mentioned earlier, when the ice dams started forming on homes back in 1994, the media started recommending that people hire contractors to remove the gutters from homes to remove the ice dams, and to prevent more from forming. While this advice was intended to help, it made matters worse!

By the time I was able to contact the media hundreds of homes had been damaged by contractors in addition to the damage that



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the ice dams had caused. Because when the gutters were torn down, there were hundreds of pounds of ice frozen on them, and to the roofing, which ripped shingles off the roofs, and in many cases ripped out the fascia and soffits as well.

Some windows were damaged as the gutters swung down and hit the sides of homes, cars and some contractors. But it was about to get worse. As the rest of the snow on the rooftops melted, it was no longer diverted away from the homes by the gutters, so it dropped right next to the foundation of the homes and flooded their basements as well.

As soon as I was able to reach the media, I explained to them why their recommendation was a mistake. Then I set up interviews with all of the local TV stations to come out to a couple of our jobsites so we could explain what caused ice dams, how to remove them safely without causing more damages, and what needed to be done to prevent them in the future.

Some other contractors were shown removing ice dams using hammers, axes and chainsaws, which can easily damage roofs. One contractor decided to use a blow torch to “melt” the snow from rooftops and set a house on fire in Maryland. I have also heard of contractors using water to melt the snow off of roofs or using power washers to blast” through the ice and melt the snow. Using a regular power

This photo shows an incident where one contractor caused an entire 3 story brick building to collapse in Middletown Connecticut in 2011, by using water to melt the snow from the roof.



washer like this is a recipe for disaster! If you spray water on the roof it will usually refreeze immediately, which will only add more weight to the roofing support structure that may already be over capacity.

How to Remove Ice Dams the “Right Way!”

In my opinion, the best and safest method to remove ice dams from roofs is to use roof rakes to pull the excess snow off the roof from a ladder. Then chip a couple of small channels in the ice dam so the water behind the ice dam, and the remaining snow on the roof will be able to melt and run off the roof. You can also use some brands of ice melt that are safe for roofing and the gutters that can speed this process up a bit. This can also be used as a preventative measure on homes that consistently have problems with ice dams.

If you’re careful and know what you are doing, you can also use a hot water pressure washer that is capable of producing steam. Then if you’re careful, you can safely cut out the ice dam without adding more water on the roof. This is a method we use occasionally but I don’t recommend it to most contractors because it can be dangerous. A hot water pressure washer or steam unit creates a very thick cloud of fog which makes it nearly impossible to see. The refreezing water can coat the ladder rungs, and anything it lands on in the area with ice, which could turn into a deadly situation if you are on a ladder!

How To Prevent Ice Dams

To prevent ice dams from forming, the attic needs to be checked to locate and seal air leaks from the heated areas of the home, and the insulation levels should also be checked to ensure that there is enough insulation in the attic. Once that has been done, the attic should also be checked for proper ventilation.

One of the most common recommendations for proper ventilation is one-square-foot of vent for every 150-square-foot of attic space. But, each climate region has different recommendations, so always get a recommendation from a licensed local insulation service. An electronic ventilation fan with a thermostat that turns the fan on when the temperatures reach a certain point can



also help. These fans can also be used in the summer to keep heat out of the attic.

If you are interested in adding ice dam removal services to your company's list of services, so you can earn more money during the winter, contact the Contractors Foundation at 1-866-621-7511 to learn more about removing Ice Dam Removals, add on services, or any type of power washing service. Their instructors have over 50 years of combined experience running successful companies that earn millions of dollars a year in sales, and they can help you reach your goals too.

I won't lie to you, removing ice dams is hard

Photos courtesy of Matthew Norman, Colorado Pro Wash LLC, www.ColoradoProWash.com



work, and it can be dangerous if you don't know what you are doing, but it is also VERY profitable. With a two man well-trained crew and the right equipment, you can usually earn an average of \$3,000 a day for removing ice dams. Considering that most power washing companies lay off their employees and close down for the winter because they can't get any work, ice dam removal services are something that contractors should consider offering to their clients.

I always suggested that contractors add on other services to build their companies to stop what I call "seasonal suicide." So many companies spend all year searching for the right employees, then spend months training and teaching them the systems you created for your business, then lay them off for the winter. I call it seasonal suicide because you spent a year PAYING your old employees to learn how to start their own power washing company! Then you give them the entire winter off to think about starting their own company. By adding on services instead, you can offer job security for your employees, and even better, you can keep valuable employees that are fully trained and ready to roll when spring arrives. So instead of scraping to get by through the winter, you can kick into high gear and get jobs done quickly while your competitors are still trying to find and train new employees.

Henry Bockman is an approved instructor for the Power Washers of North America and was involved in teaching, and creating courses for the PWNA, Alliance Trade Educations Services and the Contractors Foundation. Bockman served on the PWNA Board of Directors, is the creator of Clean Across America campaign. Bockman has received several industry award, as well as letters of recognition from the U.S. President and the Governor of Maryland. He has been involved with different government agencies including the Historical Society, the Maryland Home Improvement Commission, and various EPA departments regarding power washing and EPA compliant cleaning methods.

Bockman currently resides in Maryland with his wife of 20 years and two teenagers, and operates five different companies.