

The Hidden “Gotcha”

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Meyer’s Law: If your theories are contradicted by the facts, ignore the facts.

Water flows downhill. Flowing water spreads out on a flat surface. Edges of wood, cement board and fiber siding absorb water. Roof decking and most sidewall structures are wood. Wet wood rots.

The most susceptible areas for water intrusion in a house are the joints between the roof covering and any vertical wall. Why is it that the majority of houses seem to be built ignoring these facts?

The asphalt shingle manufacturers have noted these facts in their installation instructions. The siding manufacturers have noted them, and the building codes do so, as well. All joints between asphalt shingles and vertical side walls are supposed to have step flashing, and the siding is supposed to have at least one inch space between the bottom edge of the siding and the asphalt shingles. Yet, gaps are rare, and we are inundated with a multitude of straight flashings.

When you attach a shingle, it is typically nailed in place with the nails protruding through the wood decking underneath. The next layer of shingles cover the previous row of nails so water doesn’t seep around the nails, into the wood below. When a single long strip of metal is placed along the shingle/sidewall joint [as flashing], it becomes perforated with an orderly line of nail holes all the way up its length. Every time it rains, water seeps around the nails, bringing more moisture to all the wood devouring microorganisms living in the wood below, allowing them to continue their wood fed banquet. Because the openings are small, it usually takes a few years for the damage to become apparent. This problem is eliminated by the use of step flashing. This employs a series of metal pieces interlaced between the shingles and extending up the wall. The first piece is installed with the first shingle nailed on top. Then another metal piece is placed on top of the first shingle and capped with another shingle overlapping the bottom nail. This continues all the way up the roof/wall interface making a reliable, waterproof joint.

As the water cascades down the roof and wall, spreading toward the vertical wall, the bottom edges of the siding soak it up. Wood or fiber type siding begins to rot at the wetted bottom, and cement board siding wicks the water into the structure for deeper mischief.

When the bottom edge of the siding becomes ugly enough, many people turn to a quick fix of nailing a strip of wood along the bottom to cover the ugly spots. While it may look good for awhile, it actually makes the problem worse by trapping water behind the board and accelerating the rotting process.

A temporary repair, if done before the rotting gets serious, could be to seal the joint with flexible sealant, and maintain this seal until it is time for new shingles. Then it will be time to take off the siding at the same time and install proper step flashing.

Why is it so many people are so anxious to save a few cents in the beginning that will cost them lots of dollars later? Invoking Myers Law in the first place does not repeal Planter’s Law – you always reap what you sow, eventually.

I’ve given up asking why people do things. There’s barely enough time to avoid the results of what they’ve done.

The best solution to any problem is prevention – even a new home needs an inspection.

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