

ROOFING RIPOFF

Why Your Asphalt Shingles
are Falling Apart and What
You Can Do About It



Tim Carter

Roofing Ripoff

*Why Your Asphalt Shingles are Failing
and What You Can Do About It*

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and
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Jack Greiner did his best to keep me safe from all those who will read this book and might feel I'm spreading scandalous *speculation*.

Thanks again to you if you're one that's helped me along the way.

TC

Prologue

You and I are going on a journey.

We're going to discover why your asphalt shingle roof is disintegrating right before your eyes.

You see your gutters filling with the colored granules or collecting at the base of your downspouts.

Your shingles are curling like the fingers of an elderly person with arthritis.

Pieces of your roof are scattered in your yard after each moderate windstorm.

Hailstorms with small diameter hail inflict damage that years ago would have left your roof unscathed.

Your roof may have ugly black stains or streaks.

What you're about to read is a story of an industry that I feel might have lost its way.

That can happen when you travel, but it's not going to happen to us.

You won't be gone for long and I can assure you that as we make progress on our adventure you're going to experience a range of emotions ranging from shock to awe to anger.

Be brave.

Let's get going.

Chapter One - Our Shared Pain

Remember just a few years ago when the roofer drove away and you relaxed under your new asphalt shingle roof?

My guess is you had a mixture of satisfaction, comfort and pride knowing you invested your hard-earned money wisely. Your new roof would look good and your home and possessions would stay dry for at least twenty, twenty-five, or more years until you sold your home.

That's what the warranty on the shingle brochure and the documents your roofer gave you at the end of the job said, right?

Life was good. You could now divert your attention, time and money to other pursuits.

Fast forward just ten years or so and my guess is you're one of the many homeowners that's dismayed, frustrated and furious because your asphalt shingle roof is falling apart.

Odds are you'll now have to spend thousands of dollars to replace your roof long before its time.

Here's how you'd know if your roof is in bad shape. Are your shingles experiencing one, or more, of these defects long before the warranty is up:

- excessive loss of the colored ceramic granules
- curling edges
- cupping
- cracking
- brittleness
- ugly black streaks or stains

Here's but one example of what I'm talking about.



You're not alone, as my own asphalt shingle roof, on my current home in New Hampshire, started to fail just nine years into its thirty-year-guaranteed life span. That's a photo of my own shingles just above.

Three years after I first noticed deterioration, the entire roof suffered a catastrophic failure over a harsh winter that left the shingles delaminating as the snow and ice melted. Here's another asphalt shingle roof just a few miles from my own home. Look at how much it's deteriorated.



Does this mean all asphalt roofing shingles are defective?

No.

I believe the facts I've discovered about asphalt shingles, my own personal experience with these products over forty years, a fascinating look back at asphalt products that were made over eighty years ago, and hundreds of survey responses I've received from homeowners just like you will prove beyond a reasonable doubt that some shingle products in the marketplace appear to be sub-standard.

I suggest you and I go on a short journey even though you're busy with life. Yes, dealing with your failing asphalt shingles is no fun and you just want the pain to go away. I'm sure all you really want is an affordable roofing product that will perform as promised.

Start putting what you'll need in your backpack so we can get going. While you're getting ready, allow me to share with you why it's important for us to complete the trek.

Legends and Myths

When I was a young adult I read a fascinating and captivating book by J.R.R. Tolkien - *Lord of the Rings*.

In that book, Tolkien wrote, "*And some things that should not have been forgotten were lost. History became legend. Legend became myth. And for two and a half thousand years, the ring passed out of all knowledge.*"

That's a profound passage.

Tolkien verbalized what can happen to events, people and things that flow down the river of time and are lost to current and future generations.

Cloudy Family History

I'm sure you can relate to this. Perhaps there are mystical stories in your own family about a grandparent, or great grandparent, that did this or that, yet there's no photographs, nor statements by credible witnesses that validate the stories.

All that remains is hearsay. The stories just live in your memory and that of other family members or friends. All you can do is talk about them and people hear what you say.

Over time, as you know, the stories can change. Important facts can be left out or the stories can be embellished.

In many cases they can be forgotten.

Disappearing Old Roofers

What does this have to do with your asphalt shingle roof that looks like it's been on your home for fifty or more years?

It's easy.

There are only a few of us left that remember how asphalt shingles *used to perform*.

In other words, as more and more older builders, roofers and remodelers retire and die, their memories of what they saw up on roofs, what asphalt shingles looked like on a steep or low-slope roof after twenty-five, thirty-five and even forty years go with them to the grave.

The asphalt shingles themselves get buried deep in a landfill, making it difficult to do a scientific analysis of what was, or was not, in them. It makes it difficult to weigh them to see how they compare with shingles being made today.

Some shingles are being recycled now and become roadways that you and I drive upon. This is a great use of the material, but once they're put in the grinder, we're not able to test them.

Curating My Memories & Experience

I'm not going to allow my crisp and vivid memories to disappear and pass out of all knowledge. That's part of my motivation for writing this book.

But the primary inspiration for writing this book lies in the fact that when the roof on my own home failed at such a rapid and alarming pace and I switched hats from simple homeowner like you to nationally syndicated newspaper columnist and was rebuffed by the major players in the asphalt shingle industry, I suspected something was amiss.

For the past twenty-three years I've built my Ask the Builder brand by doing my best to discover the truth about products via my weekly column.

I decided to approach the defective asphalt shingles subject as an investigation and went looking for answers from some of the giant asphalt roofing manufacturers you'd recognize and the industry association that represents them.

Guess what?

They refused to answer my pointed questions. As work progressed to complete this book, they continued to ignore my emails and several social media requests.

Do you want to know what I asked them? I thought so.

But before you read those questions, let's go a little further down the pathway on our adventure so the questions make sense to you.

I hope you left some room in your backpack because along the way I want you to store some very important facts concerning asphalt shingles.



Chapter Two - My Base Knowledge

Building, remodeling and writing are part of my core DNA.

At an early age, I used to try to fix things around my mom and dad's home. I got the home repairs merit badge in Boy Scouts.

I was the editor of my high school newspaper. In college my friend John Pendery and I worked on the weekends and in the summer as laborers for a man that purchased old run-down homes and restored them.

As soon as I graduated from college, I started my own home remodeling and repair business.

I was fortunate to live in Cincinnati, Ohio where there was an abundance of homes that had a wide variety of roofing materials.

Thousands of homes had real slate roofing. Many older homes had tin-plated steel roofs or portions of the roof covered with this marvelous material. A few homes had wood cedar shakes. Some roofs were covered by thin sheets of cement reinforced with asbestos.

But the vast majority of homes had asphalt shingles and they still have a stranglehold on the market today.

If you visit the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association website, they say that "*.... asphalt shingles can be found atop more than 80 percent of American homes...*"

Asphalt shingles have traditionally been the mainstay here in the USA for the past 100 years because they're cheaper to make and install than just about any other roofing material.

My Memories

Remember what I said about memories? Here are mine about asphalt shingles that I saw, installed and had on my own home.

In all my years of working on older homes that had asphalt shingles, I never recall ever seeing the issues like I'm seeing, and other homeowners like you are experiencing, today.

Sure, there was an occasional worn-out and neglected asphalt shingle roof that was still in service. The owner of the building either didn't have the money or didn't care to replace his failing roof.

It was not uncommon just thirty or forty years ago for standard asphalt shingles to outlast the warranty.

The Three-Tab Shingle

When I first got into the construction business in the autumn of 1974, the primary asphalt shingle was the three-tab shingle. You can still purchase them today.



The photo above is a standard three-tab shingle. Each white tab is just under 12-inches wide and the tabs are 5-inches high. The wider black strip above the tabs will be covered by the next row of shingles. If you use these shingles on a roof, all you'll see are the white tabs once all the shingles are installed.

These traditional shingles came with a standard fifteen-year warranty. It was not uncommon for them to last twenty or twenty-five years.

I can't ever recall seeing a roof lose many of its colored ceramic granules seven years into their life.

Would you believe me if I told you that some homes in older neighborhoods with lots of shade trees had standard asphalt shingles that could last thirty and even forty years and still look good?

Well, it's true.

My Own Queen Anne Victorian Asphalt Roof

I've installed thousands and thousands of asphalt shingles with my bare hands over the past forty years.

One of the roofs that was near and dear to my heart was the stunning Queen Anne Victorian home I built for my wife back in 1986 in Amberley Village, Ohio. Amberley Village is a small town that's part of greater Cincinnati, Ohio.

We moved into our new home the summer of 1987 and moved out in 2010 when we relocated to New Hampshire. We purchased our New Hampshire home in 2008 and I traveled back and forth between the two houses over a twenty-two month period.

Back thirty years ago I couldn't afford the roof that Cincinnati house deserved so I had to roof it with the plain-vanilla three-tab asphalt shingle.

By this time, fiberglass shingles were the rage of the USA marketplace. Just about every asphalt shingle manufacturer had switched over to fiberglass as the base mat instead of the organic paper mat they had used for decades.

That simple three-tab shingle made by one of the biggest and most recognized manufacturers in the marketplace came with just a fifteen-year warranty. That means if it lasted fifteen years, I'd be happy that I got my money's worth.

But it didn't last fifteen years. It lasted much longer and I believe it could still be protecting the home and all that's inside it.

You can see this actual roof in a video I taped in 2006. The roof was twenty-years old at this point. The section of the roof you see faced southeast and received brutal sunlight from just after sunrise each day until mid-afternoon.

You can see the roof shingles exhibit no granule loss, they're not curled and they still have enough flexibility in them to allow me to install a bath fan vent flashing twenty years later without cracking the shingles!

Go here to watch the video: <http://go.askthebuilder.com/amberleyroof>

Replace for Resale

I replaced the roof in 2009 not because it was in poor shape, but because I was selling the home the following year and knew that a home inspector would state in his report the roof had outlived its warranty by ten years!

Think about that. In 2009 there were no spots at all where colored granules were missing. The shingles were not cupping or curling. The self-adhesive material under each tab was still working and the shingles were glued to one another.

My guess is the roof had still another ten years of life and it's possible it could have lasted until 2025!

The New Normal

This was normal back just fifteen or twenty years ago. You simply didn't see disintegrating asphalt shingle roofs like you do today.

As I write these words, I'm reflecting on what was once a robust product now appears to be one that's disposable. The good news is I believe I've discovered at least two asphalt shingle products that have the pedigree of a product first manufactured nearly one hundred years ago!

Furthermore, I've discovered a way to extend the useful life of asphalt shingles so they perform just like the shingles I used to work with all those years ago.

But before you and I talk about those, allow me to share the details of my own roof and other things that should be of great interest to you about asphalt shingles.



Chapter Three - My Failed Roof

This book would have never been written had it not been for my own asphalt shingle roof falling apart within years after moving into my home in New Hampshire.

I didn't build the home I'm living in and the builder who constructed it installed a shingle that came with a thirty-year warranty. The house was built around the year 2000. When I looked at the roof the spring of 2008 while seeing the home with my realtor, the roof looked brand new.

I thought to myself I might never have to replace the roof in my lifetime.

Sadly I was wrong.

First Signs of Trouble

Many homes in New Hampshire don't have gutters because the snow and ice buildups tend to rip them off homes as the ice and snow slide off the roofs.

I decided to install gutters at several locations around my home to stop water from splashing up against the front door and rear doors on the deck. I did this the summer of 2009.

Shortly after doing this I noticed a significant amount of colored mineral granules collecting in the gutters. I knew this shouldn't be happening with an asphalt shingle roof that was not yet ten years old.

It's quite possible this granule loss was happening before the gutters were installed and it was hard to notice. The granules would have fallen onto the ground and through the cracks of my rear deck.

The first fall after installing the gutters I scooped out handfuls of colored granules along with the leaves.

More Granules & Curling

Fast forward a few years to the year 2012. Just above my front door there are three roofs that connect. In the two valleys where the roof sections touch, the shingles started to show excessive wear and deterioration.

There were patches where all the colored granules were missing and the shingles were beginning to curl. I knew then the roof was in a serious state of decline and started to pay very close attention to it.

The Winter of 2014-2015

Winters in New Hampshire can be harsh, very harsh. The winter of 2014-2015 was no exception. As the winter progressed, I noticed an alarming issue where my architectural shingles started to delaminate.

My shingles were made using two different strips of shingle material. The lower layer was a solid sheet about 7 inches tall. The top layer was about 13 inches tall and a little over 36 inches wide.

The top layer had rectangular cutouts that created a three-dimensional look resembling wood shakes. This type of shingle had been around since the 1980's and was considered better looking than the standard three-tab shingle. You can see the exact shingles above my front door in the below photo.



My house roof has a steep 12 / 12-pitch roof and gravity finally won the battle as the asphalt cement used to bond the lower layer to the upper layer of some of the shingles lost its adhesive power.

The lower layer of some shingles detached completely and slid to the ground. In other cases they slid out and hung at an angle. When I picked up those that fell they were extremely brittle and crumbled with little effort.

This is not how I remembered a ten or twelve-year-old shingle to be. I prayed the roof would last until the summer when I could replace it.

The Hot Summer of 2015

I started to replace my roof the day after Memorial Day, 2015. It was a blistering hot day for New Hampshire. Little did I know but Mother Nature had decided she was going to serve up quite a few of these searing days as the summer season progressed.

As I began to strip the old asphalt shingles off I was stunned by how brittle they were. Never before in my career had I seen shingles fall apart in my hands as these.

The more shingles that I took off, the more my mood changed from concerned to angry. It's possible you share the same exact emotion as I had.

I was furious that I was sweating up on my roof replacing a roof that should not have been replaced for a minimum of fifteen more years, possibly twenty. After all, the warranty was for thirty years so the manufacturer surely felt the product would last for thirty years.

The Newspaper Ad

Just before starting the re-roofing job I noticed an ad in our local newspaper, *The Weirs Times*. This ad was purchased by a local roofing company and it talked about how they did roof inspections for failing asphalt shingle roofs. The ad also mentioned they helped with the paperwork to file a warranty claim.

I decided to call the owner of the roofing company and talk with him. When we connected, he mentioned that he was seeing asphalt shingle roofs fail all around the Lakes Region of New Hampshire. I live right in the center of this region.

When I asked him about the warranty claim for my roof, he chuckled saying it was pretty much a waste of time because the manufacturer was very tough to deal with. What's more, he said the average homeowner only got back several hundred dollars after jumping through many hoops.

My takeaway was to keep tearing off shingles and not worry about the warranty.

One Very Hot Day

As the days progressed, I was working one day in early June and became very aggravated about the entire situation. I still had lots of work to do and decided that something was very wrong. It was time to get to the bottom of it.

I'm very lucky. For the past twenty-three years I've been a member of the working press. Back in October of 1993 I started writing the newspaper column *Ask the Builder*. Within three months I had self-syndicated it into thirty newspapers.

Writing for a large audience like that allows one to open lots of doors. I discovered many years ago that industry associations love to talk with me in the hopes that I'd feature their products in one of my columns.

For example, I had worked with the Portland Cement Association, the California Redwood Association, the National Wood Flooring Association and many others in the past. Each and every time I'd contact them, they were more than willing to answer all my questions.

On this hot and humid day I decided it was time to take off my Australian outback wide-brimmed hat protecting me from the sun and put on my investigative syndicated newspaper columnist's hat to attempt to get to the bottom of my failed roof.

The Tough Questions

After taking a shower and eating dinner that day, I went up to my hot and stuffy office in the attic above my garage. There I sat down and wrote a list of probing questions I felt would help me start to understand what was causing my shingles to fail.

You may feel the questions were too tough. I knew as I was writing them some might venture into trade-secret areas of making shingles. I discovered many years ago it's best to ask questions like this as sometimes the refusal to answer tells you something.

If the questions are too sensitive, manufacturers in the past just politely would mention they couldn't reveal trade secrets.

I decided to submit these questions to the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association (ARMA) hoping they'd satisfy my curiosity. This association represents just about every manufacturer of asphalt shingles sold in the USA.

When I submitted the following questions, I told ARMA the reason I was contacting them was my own roof was falling apart and I was trying to determine what might be the cause of my own shingle failure. I was not involved in any class-action lawsuit and I had not initiated any personal legal action against the manufacturer of my own shingles.

Here are the questions I submitted to ARMA:

1. What are the components of a modern asphalt shingle? Please list everything without divulging a trade secret. I assume the list might be, but not limited to: liquid asphalt, a base mat, powdered limestone or other filler, ceramic granules and ???
2. Are there any other additives added to the shingle that contribute to the adhesion characteristic that holds the ceramic granules to the shingle?
3. Asphalt is derived by refining crude oil. Is it fair to assume that since there are different grades of crude oil, that there are different grades of asphalt?

3. If there are different grades of asphalt used to manufacture shingles, what are they?
4. How do the different grades or types of asphalt differ from one another? What is different with respect to their chemical makeup?
5. Does the different chemistry of asphalt affect the adhesive properties of the product? How so?
6. What can go wrong during the manufacturing process that might contribute to shingle quality? I'm looking for simple things like temperature of liquid asphalt, quantity of asphalt, too much filler, introduction of impurities, etc. Whatever might cause a problem.
7. Is there an asphalt that will take longer to become brittle? If so, what is different about it than an asphalt that becomes brittle faster? I'm looking for specific chemical attributes.
8. Why does an asphalt shingle become brittle? With respect to the chemistry, does this asphalt lose, at a faster rate, medium-weight hydrocarbons than an asphalt that remains pliable for many more years?
9. What's different about the asphalt component of today's shingles vs. those made fifty years ago?
10. Is there LESS asphalt in shingles made today vs. those made prior to the introduction of fiberglass mats? I'm assuming that we're talking about an apples to apples comparison of a shingle type. Take the standard 3-tab as an example.
11. Is it true that powdered limestone or other rock or ??? was introduced to the shingle manufacturing process with fiberglass mats to get the shingles up to the minimum weight of 240 pounds +/- per square?
12. Was powdered stone, or some other component, added to shingles prior to the introduction of fiberglass mats?
13. Houses built prior to 1970 rarely had any soffit ventilation and minimal gable end ventilation. Millions of these houses exist in older cities in the USA. Prior to 1970 there weren't widespread shingle failures from poor ventilation or heat build up. Why? Why would shingles on those houses fail today, but not in the 1960s?
14. If too much filler, powdered limestone, etc. is added to the shingle, how does it affect the adhesive properties of the asphalt?

The Responses

On June 11, 2015 I heard back from the Communications Director of ARMA, Ron Gumucio.

He said, "Thank you for reaching out to ARMA, however without the facts and proper research we cannot comment. I would suggest you reach out to the individual manufacturers instead. Sorry I can't be of more help."

Four days later I received an email from the Executive Vice President of ARMA, Mr. Reed Hitchcock.

Mr. Hitchcock wrote, "Ron Gumucio, ARMA's Communication Director, forwarded me your inquiry regarding Asphalt Shingle litigation. I apologize for the late response as I was out of the country last week.

While we certainly wouldn't want bad information or speculation circulating in the trade press as you suggested in your initial communication, as a trade association it is simply inappropriate for ARMA to involve itself in a commercial dispute involving one or more of our member companies. This is not a choice, it is fact. Individual companies are involved in these disputes, and each takes their own approach to responding as they see fit. If representatives of companies that you have reached-out to have referred you to us to comment, I would suggest that you're probably not in touch with the right people at those companies.

We would be glad to assist in any technical discussion where we can add value, but this is unfortunately not one of those discussions.

Please let me know if you have any other questions on this matter. And I hope we can collaborate on something positive in the future!"

Confusion

As you might expect, I was slightly confused by Mr. Hitchcock's response. In my original email to ARMA I had shed light on the fact that I was having trouble with my own roof, wanted to find out why it was failing and that I intended to write about it in a future column or article on my website.

I wasn't involved in a dispute with the manufacturer of my asphalt shingle. I just wanted the association to shed some light on how shingles were made so I could understand the reason(s) for my shingle failure at such an early point in their projected lifespan.

I took a deep breath after reading Mr. Hitchcock's email response and decided to do exactly what he suggested.

It was time to reach out to one or more of the ARMA member companies.



END OF FREE SAMPLE

Watch for the release of *Roofing Ripoff* in just a few days!

ROOFING RIPOFF

Tim Carter's newer asphalt shingle roof failed long before it should. Is your shingle roof in bad shape too? Will you have to spend thousands of dollars soon to put on a new shingle roof? Carter, founder of AsktheBuilder.com, decided to ask his 51,000-plus newsletter subscribers if they had problems too.

He was flooded with stories from people just like you from all across the USA. Tim decided to find out why shingles were failing long before they should. The top shingle manufacturers, and the association that represents them, failed to produce the answers Tim needed. He decided to investigate and what he discovered will shock and anger you.

The good news is that while writing this book, Tim discovered a simple way to extend the life of your roof shingles by decades. Open the pages of Roofing Ripoff now and allow Tim to take you on a journey uncovering the deep secrets of why your shingles, and money, are headed to the landfill.



Tim Carter writes the nationally syndicated newspaper column Ask the Builder that appears in over 60 papers in the USA. He's an award-winning remodeler and builder and founder of AsktheBuilder.com and is one of a small number of home improvement media people that has decades of hands-on experience working in, and on top of, houses of paying customers just like you.



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