

► Photo courtesy of Firestone Building Products.



the type of materials specified has increased significantly over the past decade. In general, the data shows that roofing membranes are getting thicker, more cover boards are being installed, and more redundant details are being incorporated into roofing specifications compared to ten years ago.

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The Environmental Impact of Roofing Materials is Improving

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 40 million tons of roofing waste are deposited in American landfills each year, accounting for over 25 percent of all solid construction waste. Although we still have a long way to go to eliminate this waste, our industry is moving in the right direction. In the last ten years, we’ve initiated a number of active recycling programs covering roofing shingles, roof insulation, and many single-ply roofing membranes.

In addition to reductions in solid waste,

roofing-related emissions such as VOCs have been declining as our industry moves to adhesive and sealant technologies that feature low- or zero-VOC formulations. Finally, the net environmental payback from the increased levels of thermal insulation discussed previously is reducing the long-term environmental impact related to building energy sources such as electricity and heating fuels.

The Rooftop is a Safer Place to Work

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the accident rate for roofing workers has declined over 24 percent in the past ten years. Although any roof-related accident is one too many, it’s gratifying to see that the risk of accidents has declined so much in the last decade. And it clearly suggests that we’re doing a much better job protecting the people who work on our roofs.

Because we work in a competitive industry and a challenging environment, it can be too easy to focus on the day-to-day issues and miss the gradual changes that shape our business over a decade. But when we look back on the overall record of the last ten years — including dramatic improvements in energy efficiency, durability, environmental impact, and human safety — I think we can all agree that sustainable roofing has made our roofs, our industry, and our country a better place. So here’s to the next ten years of sustainable roofing! **RC**

Jim Hoff is president of TEGNOS Research, Inc. and lead instructor for Commercial Roofing Boot Camp sponsored by Roofing Contractor and Building Envelope. Learn more by visiting www.tegnos.org.

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