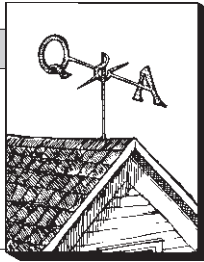


Felt is Worth it

by Henry Spies



Q. Many fellow contractors say that 15# felt is not needed under asphalt shingles. I say it is. What is your opinion?

A. The 15# felt serves three purposes: it provides a temporary cover for the roof until the shingles go on; it protects the shingles from the effects of any pitch products being baked out of the sheathing (they destroy asphalt); and it again provides temporary cover if one or more shingles blow off. Considering the relatively low cost, even if the first two do not apply I would probably use it for the third reason alone.

Breathless

Q. I still don't know the answer to the age-old question—should a house have tight vapor barriers or should it be allowed to breathe?

A. We once got a phone call from a woman who complained that she had painted her house with a “breathing” paint nearly a year ago, but she hadn't heard anything yet. The idea of a house “breathing” probably came from a misguided advertising man. The term seems to be accepted, however.

The vapor (barrier) has one purpose: to protect a cavity from moisture damage. If there is a cavity with a temperature difference from one side to the other, there should be a vapor retarder. A vapor retarder has only an incidental effect on the air-infiltration rate of the house. A ventilation rate of at least one-half air change per hour is needed for *all* houses, regardless of temperature and moisture conditions. That ventilation rate can occur through infiltration, or mechanical ventilation such as air-to-air heat exchangers.

Caulk Talk

Q. What types of caulks or gaskets will work best in the Airtight Drywall Approach (ADA)? We are looking for a material guaranteed for at least 20 years, and one that will perform well in sealing framing to framing (under a

load, in some cases), framing to drywall, and sill to foundation.

A. The gasketing material used by the originators of ADA was simply polyethylene-foam backer rod of the type used to fill deep cracks before caulking. It is cheap, easy to handle, and very compressible. I do not know of any research regarding its long-term resiliency, but it is protected from ultraviolet light, which seems to be the main deteriorating agent for polyethylene.

As far as caulk is concerned, urethane-based caulks are probably the best choice. They are warranted by the manufacturer for 20 years in most cases, and bond to porous surfaces such as wood and drywall. Silicones have a similar life span but are best restricted to nonporous surfaces such as metal or ceramics.

The main thing to remember is the proper location for the caulking materials. A bead of caulk in a corner will never hold. The caulk should be put between the materials to be sealed, not applied as a sealant over an existing joint.

Fiberglass Shingles

Q. Has anyone had problems with fiberglass roofing shingles? I don't like working with the material.

A. We haven't run into any significant problems since the manufacturers started using more adhesive in the self-sealing spots. I would be happy to receive correspondence from readers on this one. The basic reason the fiberglass shingle was developed was because the quality of the cardboard that served as the base for the standard asphalt shingle had gotten poor. The rag-content board that was originally used for asphalt shingles is now almost unavailable. ■

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