



ICE DAM REMOVAL:

AN OFF-SEASON OPPORTUNITY

by Mike Hilborn

It won't be long and winter will be upon us. For northern contract cleaners, that means a long off season and the hope that the money you made during the season will get you through to the next season. For those contract cleaners in the northland, the snow that falls on roofs becomes an off-season, money-making opportunity. Ice dams can be a serious problem for homeowners and business owners. Ice dams are caused when the snow that falls on the warmer peak of the roof melts and runs down and freezes at the colder edge of the roof. (Because heat rises, heated air that is trapped at the peak of the roof will melt the snow, as the water runs down the roof, the roof becomes cooler and cooler to where it overhangs and is the same temperature as the outside air). When this occurs, the freezing water will build an ice dam that will not allow the water to escape the roof. As more and more water melts from the peak, the water that is dammed up behind the ice dam will eventually start leaking underneath the shingles and into the house or business. At this point, water will start leaking through ceilings, light fixtures, and electrical outlets. I have seen where the entire ceiling had become so saturated with water that the ceiling collapsed into the living room. When people have water leaking through their ceiling and have water coming out of their electrical outlets, they will be panicked and want to get it resolved as

quickly as possible. The only way to stop it is to remove the ice dam that is causing the problem. The call you receive will be that of someone whose house is on fire. You will not be able to get out there fast enough. This means that you can charge a fair price for the service you provide. The following are the steps that are involved in being an ice dam removal expert.

Marketing

- Ads in local papers advertising ice removal services. After a heavy snowfall, get your ad in the local paper immediately.
- Make sure it is part of your website. People will Google ice dam removal.
- Letters to your previous customers. Have the letter ready to mail at the first sign of ice dams.

Pricing

- Flat hourly rate which includes set up, ice removal, and take down. (I will explain how to remove ice dams in a moment.) It is impossible to quote how quickly you will be able to remove an ice dam. It takes what it takes. Do not make the mistake of giving them an estimate. A typical house takes three to four hours. The typical rate to charge is \$140 to \$240 per hour.

How Do You Remove an Ice Dam?

- With a low-pressure, hot water pressure washer, melt the ice dam in one to two foot sections. Make a cut on the left side, make a cut on the right side, and then cut the ice from the

shingle. Do not try to remove the ice before it is freed via melting, you will tear the shingle it is attached to.

- Carefully toss the melted piece to the ground below. Be very careful not to throw it on fences, air conditioners, shrubs, etc. Obviously, do not throw it if people are below you. Someone hit with a piece of ice could be killed.

Safety

- Be careful. You will be removing the ice dam while standing on a ladder. There is water involved. Water that lands on your ladder will freeze and make it very slippery. When you get off the ladder, use the hot water you have to melt the ladder rungs.
- Stay away from power lines. It is better to leave a little ice behind than be electrocuted. Your customer will understand.
- Dress for the weather. Rain suit and neoprene undergarments. You must stay warm and dry.
- Clean up after you are finished. Make sure walkways and travel paths are free of ice debris and ice from the process. Be sure to have some snowmelt to leave behind.

Winter does not have to be a cash drought season. If ice dams hit, be ready. You can be quickly overwhelmed. Ice dams can be the best long day, seven days a week opportunity you may have.

Mike Hilborn is owner of Roof-to-Deck Restoration, Inc. in St. Paul, MN. cr

