

ASTM's new terminology gives industry chance to re-cover

When speaking, roofing professionals will quite often put common terms to uncommon uses. When someone says he's a built-up roofing contractor, for instance, he's probably not referring to his physical condition. Or, when someone tells you he's spent the day torching a membrane or flashing, chances are there's no reason to run to the police.

But sometimes it's not just outsiders who are confused by these terms. Frequently, contractors will use words that have become established parts of the industry's jargon without ever being precisely defined. When these terms are vague or misleading, it can lead to confusion and misunderstandings.

Vapor barriers that aren't

One example of a misused term is the name "vapor barrier." For many years, this was what the industry called the material that was used to control the flow of moisture from the warm side of a structure to the cold side. The term was misleading because the material was never a true barrier; the vapor would, in certain circumstances, move through it. In recognition of this fact, the industry has adopted the term "vapor retarder" to describe this roofing component,



and most now use this phrase instead of vapor barrier in their discussions.

Similar misunderstandings exist today concerning the use of the terms "reroofing" and "re-covering." The exact meaning of these two words has been a matter of controversy for as long as I can remember. The problem lies with the fact that neither term precisely describes the procedure it is intended to identify. The situation has been further complicated by the use of a third, equally non-descriptive term, "retrofit."

Because many in the industry have been frustrated by the imprecise use of these terms, several groups have been grappling with their exact definitions. These groups recognize the need to establish distinct expressions to describe the concepts of roofing an existing structure with the existing roof intact and with the old roof torn off.

Conflicting definitions

Some sources have already attempted to define these terms. Their conflicting interpretations have only served to confuse the matter further, however. In the "Handbook of Accepted Roofing Knowledge" (HARK) section of the *NRCA Roofing and Waterproofing Manual*, the following definition is given for reroofing: "The practice of applying new roofing materials over existing roofing materials."

The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), on the other hand, sees things a little differently. In its document D1079, *Standard Definitions of Terms Relating to Roofing, Waterproofing and Bituminous Materials*, the following definition is given for reroofing: "The process of removing and replacing an existing roofing system." D1079 uses the term "re-covering" to describe the practice HARK calls reroofing. ASTM defines re-covering as: "The process of covering an existing roofing system with a new roofing system."



ASTM's definitions have gained some support among other groups in the industry. Factory Mutual (FM), Underwriters Laboratories (UL), and the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association (ARMA) all use D1079's present terminology.

Defined once and for all

ASTM's Committee D8 on Roofing, Waterproofing and Bituminous Materials was not content to leave the wide acceptance of these terms to chance, however. This group has been working on new terminology that will have the support and consent of the entire industry. Committee D8 has voted to replace the present wording in ASTM D1079 with the new words and definitions. After much discussion, members of the Committee have come to a consensus on terms they believe are meaningful and should be used by all involved in the roofing industry. Also, with the concurrence of both ARMA and NRCA, the new definitions that will be found in ASTM's documents will be used in revisions of literature produced by FM and UL.

ASTM's new definitions are as follows:

- **Re-covering** is the process of covering an existing roof system with a new roof system.
- **Replacement** is the process of removing an existing roof and replacing it with a new roofing system.

It is hoped that this change in terminology will meet with as much success as the switch from "vapor barrier" to "vapor retarder." To ensure precise communications, I believe everyone in the roofing industry should adopt the terms "re-covering" and "replacement" to describe and distinguish between these two procedures.

Editor's note: Roofing Spec does not hyphenate the word reroofing, but does hyphenate the word re-cover to distinguish it from the term meaning "to regain health."

