OTTAWA ROOFING PRO

# Leaks & Repairs

Finding where a roof leak starts, shingle repairs, vent boots, and when a repair is enough

5 Expert Answers from Roofing IQ

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Q1

## Is repairing a few shingles enough on an older Ottawa roof?

Patching a few shingles can be the right call, but on an older roof it depends on what is happening beneath and around those shingles, not just the visible damage. A roofer who lifts the damaged pieces will check the sheathing, the underlayment if present, and the flashing at any nearby valleys, chimneys or vents before recommending repair or replacement.

A few things that shape the answer for your specific roof:

- How old the roof is relative to the material's expected service life. A 2007 NAHB industry study puts asphalt shingles at about 20 years; NAHB notes that local weather, material quality and maintenance all affect that.
- Whether granule loss, curling or cracking appears across the whole surface or only in isolated spots. A roofer can tell you whether the pattern points to localised damage or general wear.
- The condition of the eave protection beneath the shingles. The 2024 Ontario Building Code (Div. B, 9.26.5.1.) requires eave protection to run at least 900 mm up the roof slope to a line at least 300 mm inside the inner face of the exterior wall. When shingles are replaced, that requirement applies to the work area.
- The attic. Frost on the sheathing, damp insulation or staining on the rafters can point to a ventilation gap that a shingle repair alone will not fix. The 2024 Ontario Building Code (Div. B, 9.19.1.2.) sets a minimum vent area of 1/300 of the insulated ceiling area, or 1/150 on lower-slope or roof-joist construction.

On permits: the City of Ottawa lists installing asphalt shingles as a project that does not need a building permit, though heritage-designated properties and those in a Heritage Conservation District are not covered by that exemption. The Code still applies to the work regardless of whether a permit is required.
For the quote itself, ask the roofer to price the repair and a full replacement separately, and to include a per-square-foot rate for any sheathing replacement found at tear-off. Published Ottawa-area quotes put sheathing replacement at about $3 to $6 per square foot as an extra. Ask what eave protection will be used, how flashing will be handled, and what disposal covers. The Consumer Protection Act, 2002 requires a written agreement signed by both parties, an itemized price list including taxes, and a description of the work; if the quote was signed at your home it is likely a direct agreement, which gives you 10 days to cancel without reason.

The Construction Act requires you to hold back 10 per cent of the price of services and materials as they are supplied; ask a lawyer about release timing.

Keep the signed contract, the itemized quote, the written warranty, and photos of the roof taken before work starts and after it finishes: those four documents are what you will reach for if a dispute or a future leak comes up.

Q2

## Can I fix a small roof leak in Ottawa myself from the attic?

From the attic, yes, there are useful things you can do safely. From the roof surface itself, that work belongs to a roofer.

### What You Can Do From the Attic

Start inside. Go into the attic during daylight or during rain and look for water stains on the sheathing, damp or compressed insulation, frost on the wood in cold weather, or a visible daylight gap. Take photos of everything you find. Trace the wet area toward the ridge, because water can travel along the sheathing or a rafter before it drips, so the stain may be well away from where the water is actually entering. Note the location relative to a chimney, a vent pipe, a valley or a wall, since those are the places where the roof is interrupted. Share it with the roofer.

Indoors, if water is coming through the ceiling, move belongings out of the way, place a container under the drip, and take photos before you do anything else. If water is near a light fixture, an outlet or the electrical panel, leave that area and call emergency services from a safe place.

From the attic, you cannot seal the roof surface, replace a shingle, re-bed flashing or apply any exterior repair. Those repairs require working on the roof slope. Under Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act, fall protection rules apply to workers, not to a homeowner working on their own home, but the physical risk is the same regardless of the law. A roofer working on your roof is required under O. Reg. 213/91 to use fall protection where a fall of more than 3 metres is possible, and their employer must ensure Working at Heights training is current under O. Reg. 297/13. That training and equipment is what makes the exterior work safe to do.

On the permit question: the City of Ottawa lists installing asphalt shingles as a project that does not need a building permit, though the 2024 Ontario Building Code still applies to the work. The City's list names installing asphalt shingles; if the repair turns out to involve structural work, flashing details or a change of material, confirm with the City's Building Code Client Service Centre before work starts. Heritage-designated properties and properties in a Heritage Conservation District are not covered by the permit exemption, so if your home has that status, talk to the City's heritage planners first.

When you call a roofer, share your attic photos and describe exactly where the stain is relative to any penetration or valley. Ask them to give you a written description of what they find, what they propose to fix, and what the price covers, including whether sheathing replacement is priced separately if they find rot once they open the area. The Consumer Protection Act, 2002 requires that a written agreement include a fair description of the work, the total price and the payment terms, and gives you 10 days to cancel after you receive that written copy.

Call a roofer first if you do not yet know where the leak starts: until someone identifies the source, you do not yet know whether the repair is a shingle swap, a flashing job or something structural that changes the permit picture entirely.

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Q3

## Nail pops through the shingles in Kanata: leak risk?

Nail pops are worth taking seriously, but whether they are causing a leak right now depends on what a roofer finds when they look closely at each one.

When a nail backs out of the sheathing, it lifts the shingle above it. That raised tab can let wind-driven rain or snowmelt work underneath. The 2024 Ontario Building Code (Div. B, 9.26.7.4.) requires that nails not be exposed, and that they penetrate through, or at least 12 mm into, the sheathing. A popped nail fails both of those requirements.

In Kanata the Code's climate exemption for eave protection does not apply (about 4,520 heating degree-days), so a shingle roof there needs eave protection running at least 900 mm up the slope to a line at least 300 mm inside the inner face of the exterior wall (9.26.5.1.). Ask the roofer to note where each nail pop is.

From inside, look in the attic for daylight, frost on the sheathing in cold weather, or damp insulation. From the ground, binoculars can show you raised shingle tabs or dark staining around nail heads. Do not go onto the roof yourself.

A roofer will check a few things on this job:

- how many nails have popped and over what area of the roof
- whether the sheathing beneath them is still solid or has softened from moisture
- whether the shingles themselves are still flexible enough to lie flat once the nail is reset, or whether they have become brittle
- the condition of the eave protection layer underneath

For a small number of isolated pops, a repair is straightforward: the nail is reset or replaced, the shingle is re-sealed, and any damaged tabs are replaced. If pops are widespread across the field, that points to something a roofer needs to assess before deciding whether spot repairs make sense or whether a broader scope of work is warranted. Get the scope and the sheathing rate (published Ottawa-area quotes show about $3 to $6 per square foot for sheathing replaced at tear-off) in writing before work starts.

Installing asphalt shingles is on the City of Ottawa's list of projects that do not require a building permit, but the Code still applies to the work regardless.

Ask the roofer to show you, or photograph, every nail pop they find and to give you a written price that separates the repair work from any sheathing replacement they discover once they open things up.

Q4

## How do Ottawa roofers find where a leak starts?

Finding where a roof leak starts takes some tracing, because water can travel along the sheathing or a rafter before it shows up as a stain on your ceiling, so the entry point may not be above the stain.

A roofer can work from two directions. From inside the attic, they look for daylight coming through the sheathing, frost or staining on the wood, damp or compressed insulation, and dark water trails on the rafters and decking. Those trails can point back toward the source when traced uphill. On the roof surface, the roofer checks the places where the roof is interrupted: valleys, flashing at chimneys and skylights, the step flashing along any wall or dormer, and the eave edge where ice dams can push water back under the shingles. The 2024 Ontario Building Code (Div. B, 9.26.1.2.) requires that roofing, including flashing, be installed to effectively shed water and prevent moisture from entering the building, so flashing details are a natural focus.

A few specific things a roofer checks:

- whether eave protection, required under the 2024 Ontario Building Code (Div. B, 9.26.5.1.) to run at least 900 mm up the slope to a line at least 300 mm inside the inner face of the exterior wall, is present, intact and lapped correctly under the starter strip
- whether valley flashing is continuous and undamaged (Div. B, 9.26.4.3.)
- whether a chimney wider than 750 mm on its upper side has a saddle, as required by Div. B, 9.26.4.8., to divert water around it
- whether shingles have the minimum 50 mm head lap and at least 4 nails or staples for 1 m wide shingles, with none exposed (Div. B, 9.26.7.3. and 9.26.7.4.)
- whether attic ventilation meets the Code (Div. B, 9.19.1.2.)

Natural Resources Canada notes that ice dams, which form when a warm attic melts snow that then refreezes at the cold eave, can push water back under shingles and into the attic. So a roofer investigating a winter or spring leak will also look at whether the attic is properly air-sealed and insulated, not just at the roof surface.
From your side, before the roofer arrives: take photos of any ceiling stains, check the attic with a flashlight after a rain or during a thaw, and note whether the leak appears during rain, during a thaw, or both. That timing helps the roofer narrow down whether the source is a flashing gap, a shingle failure, or an ice-dam situation.

Ask the roofer to show you, in writing or with photos, exactly where they found the entry point and what they propose to fix, so you can compare that explanation across any quotes you receive.

Q5

## Is a roof leak in March from ice or rain in Ottawa?

A March roof leak in Ottawa can come from ice damming, from rain, or from both at once, and a roofer's visit is how you find out. When the attic is above freezing, it warms the roof sheathing and melts the snow in contact with the roof; the water runs down and freezes at the edge, and an ice dam can push water back under the shingles.

Natural Resources Canada describes ice dams as large masses of ice that collect at the lower edge of a roof and in the gutters. When meltwater or rain meets that ice, it backs up and can get into the attic. A well-sealed and insulated attic stays cold, so an attic check belongs in the visit. Complicated roofs with valleys, dormers or large overhangs are more prone to ice damming.

What to do right now, from inside: move anything under the stain, put a bucket down, and take photos. If water is near a light fixture, an outlet or your electrical panel, leave that area and call emergency services from a safe place. From the ground or from inside the attic, look for frost on the sheathing, damp insulation, or daylight around any penetrations.

The 2024 Ontario Building Code (Div. B, 9.26.5.1.) requires eave protection on shingle roofs, running at least 900 mm up the roof slope to a line at least 300 mm inside the inner face of the exterior wall. Ottawa's heating degree-days, roughly 4,440 to 4,520, mean the climate exemption does not apply here. Eave protection limits water pushed in by an ice dam; it does not stop the dam from forming. If the eave protection was missing or deteriorated, that is a place water can enter.

When a roofer comes out, they should look at both the roofing and the attic. The roofing side covers the condition of the eave protection, flashing at any penetrations, and the shingles themselves. The attic side covers insulation coverage, air sealing, and whether ventilation is moving cold air through the space. The 2024 Ontario Building Code (Div. B, 9.19.1.2.) requires attic vent area of at least 1/300 of the insulated ceiling area, with at least 25 per cent of the openings at the top of the space and at least 25 per cent at the bottom.

A repair quote for a March leak should set out, in writing, what the roofer will do on the roof and what, if anything, they recommend in the attic. Under the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, if the agreement includes an estimate, the supplier cannot charge more than 10 per cent above it, and you have 10 days to cancel a contract signed at your home.

Before you agree to any repair, ask the roofer to show you in writing exactly what is included in the price for sheathing replacement, disposal and attic work, since those lines can be added after the job is open.

**Disclaimer:** This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Roofing Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa or your own municipality) before

starting any roofing project, and do not go on a roof yourself. Roofing work in Ontario must meet the 2024 Ontario Building Code (O. Reg. 163/24). Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawaroofingpro.ca** for the latest answers.