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Tip Sheet: Preventing Water Damage

With the increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, water damage has become very costly and disruptive. Coupled with aging plumbing and drainage infrastructure, the potential for water leaks and sewer back up is compounding the problem. While we can’t change the weather, the good news is that there are things that can be done to prevent water damage events, and moreover, mitigate the consequences when they happen.

## Roof Systems and Exterior Openings

* Check the roof surface to make sure it is in good condition
  + no signs of deterioration such as vegetation growth, pooling/ponding of water, blistering, worn surfaces, etc.
* Check flashing and caulking to make sure it is secure and weathertight
* Drains/gutters should be cleaned and kept clear.
  + Screens can be used to keep debris from entering gutters and downpipe.
  + Downpipes should discharge away from the building perimeter.
  + Use spill pads or leaders attached to the bottom of downspouts to carry water away from building.
* Consider professional roof inspections to determine condition, remaining life, and repair/replacement considerations if necessary
* Visual inspections of roof and drainage systems should be done twice per year (spring and fall), or after a severe windstorm.
* Check windows and doors to make sure they are properly sealed and there are no signs of water penetration to the frame or interior.

## Drainage

* The perimeter ground surfaces should slope away from the building
* Storm water runoff ditches and collection ponds in rural areas should be kept clear and free of debris/vegetation
* Storm sewers and catch basins should be kept free of obstructions and blockage. Interior floor drains should be clear and unobstructed.
* Where there has been a history of sewer back up, backflow preventers should be installed.
* Subsurface ramps, stairwells, window wells etc. should have curbing and/or suitable drainage to prevent heavy rains from entering the building through these entrances.

## Plumbing

* Check exposed visible plumbing regularly to make sure it is in good condition. Any minor leaks should be repaired immediately. Signs of corrosion or pitting include greenish discoloration and most often occur at elbows or tees and should be replaced before leakage occurs. Swollen or expanded pipe should be immediately replaced.
* Consider replacing any galvanized piping.
* Only use certified and insured plumbers for any work.
* Make sure water supply connections to appliances are good quality, braided steel, preferably with CSA approval. Plastic connectors and/or lines should be replaced. Rubber hoses for washing machines should also be replaced with braided steel.
* All hot water heating or sprinkler piping (where installed) in areas exposed to freezing have glycol or other approved anti-freeze solution.
* In winter months all areas should be checked to ensure no loss of heating, from windows, doors, or other abnormal conditions that would cause freezing.
* Where high value and/or highly susceptible contents are present, consider installing water sensors.
* Check crawlspaces, attics and other areas for moisture and ensure proper ventilation is provided

## Emergency preparedness

* Know the location of shutoff valves for the water supply.
* Once per year, operate the main shutoff valves to prevent them from seizing and not functioning when needed
* Monitor local forecasts and take action in the event of approaching severe weather – close windows, doors, etc.
* Maintain up to date phone numbers