

Spring Storm Prep: Protect Your Church from High Winds

Wind damage caused by spring storms, tornadoes and derechos can cause significant damage to ministry buildings. But you're not powerless to protect your church. Here are eight things to check on while the weather is calm. Use this list to help minimize, and even prevent, wind damage.

1. Keep tabs on your roof.

The roof covering (asphalt or cedar shingles, metal, rubber) is one of the most vulnerable components of a building when exposed to high winds. Routine maintenance can extend a roof's life and potentially reduce roof damage during an event.

- Contact a licensed roof contractor to create and conduct a preventative maintenance plan.
- Plan several inspections throughout the year to monitor roof condition, particularly around season changes.
- Look for tears, bubbles, cracks, and ponding water on flat roofs.
- Remove excess debris and inspect for loose or missing materials following storms or roof work. Look for left-behind tools and equipment.

Read more roof tips from Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company.

2. Check perimeter flashing.

Roof flashing refers to the strips of metal or other material installed around the roof edge where the roof cover meets the wall. When the flashing is compromised, it leaves important building and roof systems vulnerable to wind-driven rain. This can cause significant damage.

- Visually check for loose or ill-fitted perimeter flashing several times a year.
- Hire a contractor to repair loose or damaged flashing according to the manufacturer's instructions.

3. Inspect roof-mounted equipment.

Roof-mounted equipment includes satellite dishes, security equipment, signs, HVAC units, vents and ducts, pipes and more.

During severe weather, unsecured equipment is subject to sliding, lifting and overturning. This can cause considerable damage, leading to roof failure and potential water intrusion. Make sure to have a contractor:

- Securely attach equipment to an adequate roof support, commonly called a curb, which is attached to the roofing structure. Inspect equipment for any loose or missing connections.
- Inspect for loose flashing around equipment, curbs and roof hatches.
- Clear all debris around and under roof-mounted equipment that can cause water to pond.
- Ensure fasteners on service panels are in place to prevent dislodging.

4. Prevent skylight leaks.

When damaged, ill-fitting or improperly attached, a skylight breach can lead to significant interior water damage.

- Regularly inspect skylights for structural cracks, damage and leaks. Address any rotting with a contractor.

5. Minimize risk from flying debris.

Any unsecured item around ministry property can become wind-borne debris during a storm, causing property damage and injuring people.

- Regularly inspect outdoor signs to ensure connections function properly, have no missing bolts or screws, and are free from rust.
- Before a storm, store outdoor equipment in a safe location protected from high winds.
- Keep trees trimmed and healthy. Remove limbs that could fall on a roof, structure or power lines.
- Aggregate or pavers on built-up flat roofs can become airborne, especially during tornadoes and hurricanes, causing extensive property damage. If you have this type of roof, talk to a contractor about phasing it out.

6. Examine HVAC units.

One type of unit, a packaged terminal air conditioner (PTAC), is commonly found in commercial buildings and building additions. If your ministry uses a PTAC, it is important to ensure it is professionally installed and able to resist wind-driven rain. Leakage of these units often results in costly damage.

- Ensure all PTAC units are tilted toward the outside of the building. Hire a contractor to fix the unit.
- Inspect the weather stripping between the PTAC unit and sleeve to ensure it has been installed correctly and consistently.
- Look for improper or damaged caulking around the PTAC unit.

7. Survey doors and entryways.

When damaged by wind or debris, commercial doors can lead to

interior damage and costly roof repairs.

- Inspect the brackets that connect the door frame to the structure. Look for loose brackets, missing bolts or nuts and broken pieces.
- Examine panels for damage, warping and rusting. For significant damage, fix or replace the door.
- Ask a contractor if your doors are rated for wind conditions in your area. Retrofit improvements can be a cost-effective improvement.

8. Maintain windows, window frames and shutters.

Professionally fitted windows and shutters keep wind and water out of your building. Proper maintenance and regular inspections ensure the strength and easy deployment of these protection systems well before a storm.

- Check impact-rated windows for any damage or poorly fitted gaskets. Hire a contractor to fix damaged gaskets.
- Inspect the connections of permanent shutters. Ensure all fasteners are properly embedded into the structure and that shutters are tightly attached.
- Regularly test shutter operation. This helps ensure the shutters will deploy prior to a high wind event.
- Store temporary shutters, including plywood, flat and in a dry location. Include these in your regular inspections, too. Look for rodent, dry rot and water damage.

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