

Synthetic Underlayments – Too Good to be True?

By Sal Catanese



Marketed and manufactured in Europe & Canada for the past 30 years, a new leading-edge technology is taking hold of the roofing industry in the United States. Synthetic underlayments can best be described as one of the newest members of a generation of high-tech, high performance underlayment alternatives. They can be used under shingles, tiles, slate, metal or cedar shakes and synthetic roof claddings. In cases of unforeseen weather conditions or construction delays, the installed product can be left uncovered for months and maintain its leak-free status. It retains its resistance to water even after long-term exposure to UV rays and heat and is lightweight yet very strong. Sound too good to be true? A closer look into the composition of these new synthetic underlayments and further details on the product's benefits may help convince you to give this new "miracle material" a try.

Most synthetic underlayments are polymer based polyethylene, polypropylene woven or spunbonded heavy laminates. Onto the top of the product is added an anti-slip coating or layer of material which is also laminated. This enhances the foot/seat holding properties of the materials. That makes it a safe slip resistant surface for contractors to work on. The extreme low weight of the material makes it easy for crews to transport and install – a ten square roll weighs

less than 50 pounds. Contractors report that their crews adapt easily to working with it and find that application times are two to three times faster. The material is very rugged and resists damage during installation. It's easy to cut and mold around corners and some products seal around nails and penetrations to prevent leaks. It does not promote the growth of mold and because it doesn't absorb water, it prevents the occurrence of waves or humps which may affect the final appearance of some roofing materials. And it only costs pennies more per square foot than traditional underlayments. Still skeptical? Read on . . .

◆ Contractors in various areas of the United States report record placement times. A crew of six installed 10,000 square feet on a 6:12 pitch roof in four hours.

◆ A commercial job installed two weeks prior to Hurricane Floyd survived the storm's high winds and heavy rains, required no repairs and remained absolutely leak free.

◆ After experiencing a 50% decrease in installation time, one residential project was subject to two days of heavy rains. When the contractor returned to finish the project, he found the client's home and its contents dry. The roof continues to perform excellently.

Although it's human nature to resist change, it's hard to deny the advantages of using synthetic underlayments. If you think it sounds too good to be true, let's take a minute to review the product's primary benefits:

•With its multilayer polypropylene and polyethylene composition, synthetic underlayments provide strength, light weight, tear resistance and longer life to almost any project.

•Although fairly new in the States, the materials' basic components are products that have been proven in the harsh climates of northern Europe and Canada for over 25 years.

•Synthetics perform better when tested against traditional underlayments particularly when subjected to high winds, insects, vermin, rot and fungus. Its low weight allows for faster, easier and more secure installation.

•The material's superior strength means no more job repair worries from tears and holes.

•Synthetics are approximately 6 times lighter than 30# felt paper and much stronger. They contain no asphalt and will not disintegrate under the roof covering after years of use. It will remain an effective and useful underlayment.

Go ahead, challenge yourself and your company to this "new" technology. I think you'll find it lives up to its excellent reputation and you won't be disappointed.