



Cool Roofs are Hot

Moorpark company's acrylic application helps cut cooling costs

By Allison Bruce
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These days, “green” roofs are white.

A Moorpark company has been growing its business in “cool roofs” since it did its first installation in 2001 — for BMW DesignworksUSA in Newbury Park.

Now that the green movement is afoot, homeowners want to cut cooling bills and companies are increasingly asked how they will make their buildings energy efficient, said Rod Menzel of GreatWay Roofing.

The roofing system, called fluid-applied reinforced acrylic, is sprayed on like paint and is considered easy to repair. Even the U.S. Energy Secretary has advocated cool roofs.

“Since the talk’s been out there, more people are like, ‘I ought to go ahead and do it,’ ” Menzel said.

The white roofs reflect the rays of the sun, making it cooler inside the buildings. The Cool Roof Rating Council reports average energy savings from 7 to 15 percent of total cooling costs.

“For us, it’s real simple,” Menzel said. “Without complicating things: You cool a roof down, you cool a building down.”

Menzel started GreatWay, then called Great American Roofing, in 1999. The company employs 16 people.

Until the recession, GreatWay had been growing by about 20 percent per year since it started, Menzel said.

The cool roof “is becoming a bigger and bigger portion of our business,” he said.

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Besides being able to sell the bottom-line savings in energy, Menzel said he likes that the cool roof system is safer for his employees to install than a hot asphalt roof and doesn't carry the fire and fumes hazards of a traditional roofing job.

The company currently is installing roofs on about 189,000 square feet of roof space on four new industrial buildings in Oxnard.

Those buildings belong to Sunbelt Enterprises, which has 60 properties and close to 3 million square feet of space in its portfolio. The company has used cool roofs over the years, including the Kavlico building in Simi Valley, said Bjorn Nilsen, general manager of Sunbelt.

Nilsen said the cool roof significantly reduced the electricity bill there, lowering the temperature by about 10 degrees in the afternoon heat.

But it also offers other advantages the company likes.

While "hot mop" tar roofs have a tendency to leak, as do roofs installed with seams, the liquid coat creates little chance for leaking, he said.

Menzel said the cool roof can go over an existing roof, or, as was the case with the Sunbelt buildings, his team can install a fire sheet, an emulsion and polyester fabric, and then the white coating on top.

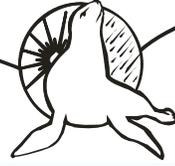
The cool roof system cost ranges, on average, from about \$1.80 to \$2.80 per square foot on commercial projects or \$2.25 to \$3.25 per square foot on residential projects, depending on the size and complexity of each project and factoring in the extra setup cost on a residential installation, Menzel said.

Even though the system can cost more for materials, there are labor savings and often the old roof doesn't need to be torn off, which saves on dump fees for the old material and can make a project competitive with a traditional roof installation, he said.

The majority of his commercial projects are cool roofs, which also includes a single-ply PVC with heat-welded seams.

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Lately, there's been a boost in residential interest as well, particularly with the availability of a green tax credit. For those who want the aesthetics of a shingled roof, he offers colored shingles that reflect and don't hold the heat.

Grace Lennox of Ventura has a flat roof on her home and was looking for something to replace her existing roof.

"My previous roof was supposed to be good 10 to 15 years and it didn't even last five," she said.

What drew her to the cool roof was its dependability and lifetime warranty. The cooling was a bonus.

"So far, I've noticed a difference," she said.

Even though Ventura hasn't hit the really hot days of summer, she said her temperature gauge shows the inside of the home is 5 to 8 degrees cooler than it was with a black roof.