

Gutter Protection is Not Ice Protection

This time of year is a major challenge for **gutter cover** contractors in the northern climate. With the onset of winter, service issues arise from angry homeowners complaining of the formation of **icicles** in areas that never used to have ice build-up.

Without **gutter protection**, icicles on the gutter are caused by **snow melt** accumulating in the gutters and down spouts, and overflowing the gutters.

With gutter protection, the ice doesn't have to fill the gutters and down spouts before it overflows as icicles. Snow melting off of the roof flows over the cold eave and then hits the cold metal of the **leaf guard** where it freezes.

Systems such as **gutter screen** inserts in the gutter and fascia mounted products commonly referred as "All in One" gutter / **gutter guards** have exaggerated ice issues. The transition of snow melt coming off the roof is abrupt as the ice falls on to the gutter toppers and splatters breaking into smaller drops. Smaller drops are more likely to freeze and the ice is spread out more from the splashing snow melt. Worse, the mounting of gutter screen inserts and "All in One" gutter protectors positions the accumulated layers of ice underneath the first row of shingles.

Systems that mount over the first row of shingles protect ice from getting under the shingles, but they still get their share of ice build up.

A proactive stance is for the **gutter cap** contractor to explain that their product is to avoid **gutter cleaning** by preventing leaf debris from getting into the gutters, not to prevent icicle formation. Some companies do a very thorough job. For example, the "All in One" gutter guards admit the issue of icicle formation in their warranty. All products will have some drawbacks and consumers appreciate sales reps that don't "sugar coat" potential issues. It's better to warn the consumer than to try to explain later why they weren't given the information about a potential pit fall.

For some gutter cap contractors, ice formation is not an issue due to improvements in **gutter heating** with self regulating **heat cables**. Self regulating heat cables are a dramatic improvement over **heat tape** and wires which rely on constant wattage and could start on fire. Self regulating heat cables gently heat leaf guards, **seamless gutters**, and down spouts. They are a viable solution to excessive ice formation.

Careful consideration needs to be taken for initial cost of installation and energy cost. You need to research the company doing the installation. There are no short cuts to installing these systems. Proper procedures using proper components during the installation phase are critical for an effective system. Be wary of low cost providers and always ask for references of past heater cable jobs.

Additional Resources

The Hazards of Ice in Your Gutters
The Failure of the Cold Roof Concept.