

Safe Roof Moss Control

Clean rivers start at home

Working for clean rivers and healthy watersheds to improve habitat for endangered fish and create a livable, sustainable community.

Moss on the roof is a common problem in the Pacific Northwest, but some moss removal methods can pollute our rivers and streams. Here are some useful tips for environmentally-friendly moss prevention and treatment.

How Much Moss Is a Problem?

Growth of moss on most standard residential roofing materials (either

three-tab composition shingles or cedar shingles and shakes) can damage the roof. Try



to concentrate moss control efforts on the parts of the roof most prone to moss problems. These are typically on north-facing slopes and in the shade of trees or other buildings. Parts of the roof that get direct sun are unlikely to develop moss problems.

Prevention of Moss Problems

In areas of your roof where you need to control moss, consider first how to prevent moss growth.

Install a metal roof.

Moss can't grow on the smooth surface. If you need a new roof in a moss-prone area, or if you are con-

sidering metal roofing for other reasons, this can be a useful and relatively permanent solution. Metal roofing is more expensive than composition shingles, but because metal roofs don't have to be replaced as often, the lifetime cost is comparable.

Remove overhanging branches.

Branches that overhang the roof and shade the roofing material cause slow drying after rainfall. Trees near buildings are beneficial because they provide cooling in the summer and a windbreak in stormy weather, but should not excessively shade roofs. You certainly don't

need to remove trees for moss control. Just thin branches that are causing lots of shade on the roof.



Keep your roof clean.

In western Oregon, it's a good idea to clean roofs once or twice a year. Cleaning removes leaves, needles, and other debris that slows drying of the roof and removes moss. During the summer, you can sprinkle powdered dish or laundry detergent on moss-covered areas. Wait three or four days, and remove moss with a broom or brush. Make

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sure to clean the moss and soap out of your gutters as well. Wet sweeping will also remove most of the moss, as long as plants have not gotten too well established. If your roof slope is steeper than five inches of rise per horizontal foot, you will need either to hire a professional or use professional equipment. You should start at the top of the roof and work down; otherwise you may damage your shingles. If the roof has lots of moss, you may need to use a pressure washer.

Treatment of Problem Areas

Pesticide products most commonly sold for moss control contain zinc sulfate. Zinc, while a naturally-occurring mineral, can pollute rivers and streams and is toxic to aquatic animals. The other problem is that zinc sulfate kills moss but it won't remove the plant material from the roof. If there is a significant amount of moss, you would still need to clean the roof following the use of a zinc sulfate product. Simply cleaning the roof without using the pesticide is less work and better for the environment.

Zinc strips are one alternative to zinc sulfate products. These are strips of metallic zinc roughly

three inches wide that are nailed near the top of the roof just below the peak. The easiest time to do this is while you're installing new shingles, but you can also install the strips on an existing roof. The strips are long-lasting and release only



a small amount of zinc into the environment at any time.

However, zinc strips have disadvantages. Even though each strip releases a small amount of zinc, the cumulative effect of widespread use will still pose a pollution threat to rivers and streams. Another disadvantage is the application process. The brand of strips available in the Northwest requires use of a pesticide prior to installing the strips in order to kill all existing moss. It's better for the environment to simply wash your roof instead of using a pesticide.

Do Your Part

Clean water and healthy rivers and streams are everyone's right and responsibility. The type of chemical treatment you use to maintain your home and garden may be harmful to your neighborhood waterways. To control roof moss, keep your roof clean and prune nearby trees. For a more permanent fix, consider installing zinc strips after you've cleaned your roof, but try to minimize their use. Install them only in areas where moss is a problem. Live with moss that's not damaging your roof.

With responsible home and garden care, we can work together to improve water quality and protect fish habitat for a sustainable community.

References

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www.cleanrivers-pdx.org**