

Alaska HomeWise: Ask a Builder
By Cold Climate Housing Research Center Staff

The "Ask a Builder" series is dedicated to answering some of the many questions Fairbanks residents have about building, energy and the many other parts of home life.

I'd like to put a metal roof on my new home. Is there anything I need to consider about metal roofing before I do this?

There are a few things that set metal roofing apart from other types of roofing. For starters, in terms of longevity, metal roofing can be an excellent choice. It is going to be more expensive though, so everything has a trade-off. Keep in mind that if you are looking at metal roofing and looking at doing it yourself, that there are screw patterns designed by the manufacturers for putting that roofing on, so be aware of the installation guidelines.

The main thing with metal roofs is that they're going to be a lot more likely to shed snow. On a steep pitch, you're pretty much guaranteed that the snow is going to slide off at some point during the winter, and if it doesn't happen then, it will happen on some warm day during the spring. When snow slides off, there is a lot of potential for damage because the snow has so much weight. You can shear a deck off a house, you can crush a car, or, if it's over a doorway, you can walk outside, slam the door and have it all come down. It can be dangerous, so if you want to put on a metal roof, think about all the things that can be damaged from snowfall around your home. If you see areas of concern, start looking at snow stops as a solution. Those are essentially just a series of pre-bent steel triangles that are quite sturdy. They get screwed on in rows going up the roof according to the manufacturer's pattern for attachment.

Also remember that just as anything on the ground is susceptible to snow damage, anything on your roof is as well. This means stovepipes, septic vent pipes, and other objects. Sliding snow can shear those off, or break them. So, once again, use snow stops or install a cricket around pipes on your roof. A cricket is a metal triangle that looks a little like a dormer. A lot of the sheet metal places will make those for you. A cricket acts like an old cowcatcher on a train. When the snow comes down, it hits the cricket and gets diverted to either side of the pipe, thus avoiding damage.

What's the difference between yellow and pink foam insulation?

In terms of foam, there's yellow, pink, blue, white and others. They are all a little different chemically. The pink and blue foam are typically rated for below grade (below the soil), have a higher density, and greater water resistance. Yellow foam usually has a foil facing on both sides. That foil facing is pretty much an air and vapor barrier if you tape the joints, however yellow foam is not typically dense enough to work below grade. The bottom line here is that rigid foams give you a lot of insulating value for minimal thickness, but you definitely want to check with the manufacturer's recommendations, and those are readily available at the location you purchased the foam. You want to make sure the foam is rated for your application and whether or not you're going to put it in a moist area, or bury it.

On that note, when referring to the fluffy fiberglass insulation, the difference in colors is the manufacturer's choice for their brand, not a designation of chemical makeup or density.

Alaska HomeWise articles promote home awareness for the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC). If you have a question, e-mail us at akhomewise@cchrc.org. You can also call the CCHRC at (907) 457-3454