

## **King County Office of Emergency Management Podcasts**

### ***Disasters: Are you ready?***

#### **Roofing Materials**

This is not going to be a very sexy topic, but it is about one of the most important decisions you will make, and one of the most expensive ones when it comes to building and maintain your home.

It is about your roof and what it is made of. There are any number of roofing options. Popular choices include, composition, tile, metal, wood shake and even slate. When I say expensive, the costs for an “average” roof can be between \$5-\$60K depending on the type and quality of the materials you select.

Now you may ask, why is this even a topic for an emergency management focused Podcast? It is all about the survivability of your home in a fire event, and even the performance of the structure during an earthquake.

I have read it many times, the type of roof on your home will many times determine if your home burns, or doesn't burn in a wild land interface fire. These are fires that happen not just in the forest, but those areas where people have moved into either with vacation and retirement homes, or in many cases just the urban environment. I call much of Eastern King County an “urban forest.” People have preserved the forested environment with green belts and natural forested areas that surround many of our housing developments.

If you have a wood shake roof made from cedar, you basically have kindling for a roofing material. If I want to easily start a fire in my wood fire place at home, I like to have cedar as kindling and cedar shakes make great kindling. Now comes the crux of the issue. Here in the Northwest Cedar was and still is in some places the preferred roofing material. If you have a quality home, it is expected that it will come with a cedar shake roof. The same home with a high quality composition roof does not have the same economic value as a cedar shake roof. There are even covenants in neighborhoods that require

either tile or cedar shake roofs. I know, I live in one such neighborhood.

So, when it came time to replace my cedar shake roof with another newer roof, I tried convincing my neighbors to either allow high quality composition roofs, or metal roofs with a shake appearance. My ability to sell this idea was dismal. The cultural value of cedar shake roofs won out over any potential loss of their homes from a fire event. In their mind they couldn't see the hazard that they live amongst. Wild land interface fires happen in California and Eastern Washington, not in the middle of Puyallup and Western Washington where it rains 75% of the time.

Culture does change over time, and the escalating costs of a good cedar roof will perhaps someday change people's minds over the value of protecting their homes from fires. But that day is not today, and definitely not in Puyallup.

Yes, I replaced my cedar shake roof with another cedar shake roof. In the future, when you have to chose, I hope you don't have to make the same choice I did because of people's inability to see the risks of living in the "Evergreen State." It's the trees man, it's the trees!