

The Full Guide to Commercial Roofing Austin Business Owners Trust

When I first started working with commercial properties in Austin, I quickly realized that residential roofing know-how only goes so far. A house might have a simple gable or hip roof, but a 20,000-square-foot warehouse or a strip mall with multiple tenants is a completely different animal. Over the years, I have seen business owners make expensive mistakes because they treated their commercial roof like a big house roof. That is why understanding the options and realities of commercial roofing Austin is so important for anyone managing or owning commercial real estate here.

Commercial roofs take a beating from the Texas sun, sudden hailstorms, and the occasional hard freeze. They have to handle heavy HVAC units, multiple roof drains, and sometimes even foot traffic from maintenance crews. The materials and methods used for these roofs have evolved a lot in the last two decades. What worked in 2005 might not be the best choice for a building going up today, especially with rising energy costs and stricter building codes. Let me walk you through the main types of commercial roofing systems you will encounter, what they are good for, and where you need to be careful.

Single-Ply Membranes: The Workhorses of Low-Slope Roofing

If you drive around any commercial district in Austin, you are looking at miles of single-ply membrane roofing. This category includes TPO roofing, PVC roofing, and EPDM roofing. Each has its own personality, and choosing between them often comes down to the specific building and budget.

TPO roofing has become incredibly popular in the last ten years. It is a thermoplastic membrane that comes in wide sheets, and the seams are heat-welded together. That means the seams are as strong as the material itself. TPO also reflects sunlight well, which helps with energy-efficient roofing goals. Many of the cool roofs you see on big-box stores and office parks are white TPO. It handles ponding water reasonably well, but you still need good drainage systems to prevent long-term issues.

PVC roofing is similar to TPO but has a longer track record. It is also heat-weldable and very durable against chemicals and grease, which is why you see it on restaurants and industrial kitchens. The downside is that PVC can be more expensive, and some building owners worry about environmental concerns with plasticizers. In practice, modern PVC is stable and performs well for decades.



EPDM roofing is the old reliable. It is a synthetic rubber membrane that has been around since the 1960s. EPDM is incredibly flexible, even in cold weather, and it resists UV damage well. The seams are usually adhered with liquid adhesive or tape, which is not as strong as a heat weld. That means EPDM requires careful installation and regular maintenance at the seams. I have seen EPDM roofs last 30 years when they are well cared for, but neglect can lead to leaks at the lap joints.

Built-Up Roofing and Modified Bitumen

Before single-ply membranes took over, built-up roofing was the standard for flat and low-slope roofs. A built-up roof consists of multiple layers of roofing felt and asphalt, applied hot or cold, creating a thick, redundant barrier. These roofs are tough and handle foot traffic well. The downside is that they are labor-intensive to install and repair, and they can be heavy. You rarely see new built-up roofing on large projects anymore, but it is still used on some specialty buildings.

Modified bitumen is a more modern evolution. It uses asphalt modified with polymers to improve flexibility and UV resistance. It comes in sheets that are torched down or applied with cold adhesive. Modified bitumen is popular on roofs with a lot of penetrations or complex shapes because it conforms well. It also works great as a base layer under other systems. I have specified modified bitumen for areas around skylights and roof vents because it is forgiving and easy to flash.

Metal Roofing and Standing Seam

Not all commercial roofs are flat. Many retail centers, schools, and churches use sloped metal roofing. Standing seam metal roofing is a premium option that uses interlocking panels with raised seams. It is very durable, fire-resistant, and can last 50 years or more with proper care. The seams create a weathertight barrier that handles heavy rain and wind well. Standing seam roofs also work with solar panel attachments, which is a growing trend.

Other metal roofing profiles, like corrugated panels, are cheaper but more prone to leaks at the fasteners. If you go with metal, make sure the gauge is appropriate for the span and that the finish is rated for the Texas sun. Dark colors can warp and fade quickly.

Liquid-Applied and Spray Polyurethane Foam

For roofs with lots of curves, domes, or tricky details, liquid-applied membranes are a lifesaver. These are coatings that are sprayed or rolled on and cure into a seamless rubber-like membrane. They bond directly to the substrate, so there are no seams to fail. They work well for roof coatings on concrete decks or for repairing old metal roofs. The main drawback is that application requires skilled labor and tight temperature control. If the weather is wrong, the cure can be compromised.



Spray polyurethane foam is usually used for insulation, but it can also serve as a roofing system when coated with a protective layer. It provides excellent insulation and seals gaps completely. However, it needs a UV-resistant top coat or it will degrade quickly. I have seen spray foam roofs perform beautifully on freezer buildings and cold storage facilities, but they are not a common choice for general [commercial roofing Austin](#) buildings.

Green Roofing and Energy-Efficient Options

Green roofing is becoming more common in Austin, especially on buildings aiming for LEED certification or just wanting to reduce the heat island effect. A green roof has a waterproof membrane, drainage systems, growing medium, and plants. It absorbs rainwater, provides insulation, and extends the life of the waterproofing underneath. But green roofs are heavy, require structural engineering, and need ongoing irrigation and maintenance. They are not a set-it-and-forget-it solution.

For most commercial buildings, the easiest way to improve energy efficiency is to install a cool roof coating or a white single-ply membrane. Cool roofs reflect more sunlight and absorb less heat, which cuts air conditioning costs. Combined with proper roof insulation, the savings can be significant. I always recommend checking the insulation levels whenever a roof is replaced. Adding insulation at that time is cheap compared to doing it later.

Flashing, Vents, and Drains: The Details That Matter

No matter what roofing material you choose, the roof is only as good as its details. Roof flashing around parapets, curbs, and penetrations is the most common source of leaks. Metal flashing that is properly integrated with the membrane is essential. Similarly, roof vents need careful flashing and sealing. I have seen many roofs fail because the vent boots cracked after a few years.

Roof drains are another critical area. They must be sized correctly for the roof area and local rainfall rates. Austin gets some intense storms, and if drains clog or are too small, water ponds and eventually finds a way in. Regular maintenance of drains and scuppers is a must. Skylights can be a wonderful source of natural light, but they are also potential leak points. Modern skylights with insulated curbs and proper flashing can be reliable, but cheap units are trouble.

Making a Choice for Your Building

If you are looking into commercial roofing Austin for a new building or a replacement, the first step is understanding your building's structure and your budget. A low-slope roof on a concrete deck can handle a wide range of systems. A steep-slope metal roof on a wood frame has fewer options. Also consider the use of the building. A restaurant needs a roof that resists grease

and high temperatures. A data center needs a roof that will not leak under any circumstances, with redundant drainage and high-quality insulation.



I always tell clients to get at least three quotes from reputable contractors who specialize in commercial work. Ask for references and visit previous jobs if possible. Look at the quality of the flashing and the seams. A clean, well-organized job site usually means a careful crew.

Commercial roofing is a long-term investment. The cheapest bid today can cost you double in repairs and lost business over the next decade. On the other hand, paying for unnecessary upgrades is also wasteful. A good contractor will help you match the system to the building, not just sell you the most expensive option.

Understanding these basics will help you have an informed conversation with any roofer. Whether you are dealing with a leak, planning a replacement, or building from scratch, knowing the difference between TPO and modified bitumen, or why standing seam works well on a sloped roof, gives you confidence. Commercial roofing Austin has many skilled professionals, and the market has matured to offer real choices. Take your time, ask questions, and think about the long haul.