How to Spot a Bad Roofer Before You Sign a Contract

Why the Wrong Roofer Costs More Than Money

I have seen it happen more times than I can count. A homeowner in Austin notices a leak after a heavy spring storm, calls the first roofer with a five-star rating on Google Reviews, and signs a contract on the spot. Three months later the flashing around the chimney is already peeling, the gutters are sagging, and the roofer will not return phone calls. That is the moment most people start looking for the signs of a bad roofer - but by then the damage is done. A bad roofer does not just waste your money. They can compromise the structural integrity of your home, void your manufacturer warranty, and leave you with a roof that needs to be replaced years ahead of schedule.

The roofing industry in Texas is not tightly regulated compared to other trades, which means the burden of vetting falls on you. The good news is that the signs of a bad roofer are almost always visible before you sign anything. You just need to know where to look.

The Pitch That Sounds Too Good to Be True

A roofer who shows up uninvited after a storm, offers a discount for signing that day, and asks for a large cash deposit upfront is a classic red flag. Legitimate contractors in the Austin area rarely door-knock. They have steady work through referrals, Angi, HomeAdvisor, and local reputation. If a roofer pressures you to decide on the spot, they are trying to bypass your chance to check their credentials.

One of the clearest signs of a bad roofer is a reluctance to provide proof of insurance. Every roofer working in Texas should carry both workers' compensation insurance and general liability insurance. Without workers' comp, you could be held liable if a worker is injured on your property. Without general liability, you have no recourse if they drop a bundle of asphalt shingles through your skylight. Ask for the certificate of insurance directly from their provider, not a photocopy they hand you. Then call the agency to verify it is active.

The License That Is Not a License

Texas does not have a statewide roofer license, but the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation oversees certain trades and the Texas Roofing Contractors Association of Texas provides voluntary certification. Many homeowners assume a roofer who claims to be "licensed" has passed some kind of competency exam. In reality, a roofer may hold a general

contractor license or a local permit from the City of Austin Permits office, but that is not the same as a roofing-specific credential.

Before hiring anyone, use the Contractor License Lookup tool on the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation website to see if the roofer has any complaints or disciplinary actions on file. A clean record does not guarantee good work, but a pattern of complaints is a strong warning. Cross-reference the roofer's name on the Better Business Bureau, Yelp, Facebook, and Nextdoor. If the same complaint about incomplete work or shoddy repairs appears on multiple platforms, consider it a pattern, not a coincidence.

What the Estimate Does Not Say

A detailed written estimate is one of the best tools you have to evaluate a roofer. A bad roofer will give you a verbal quote or a one-line number on a napkin. A good roofer will break down the cost by materials, labor, disposal fees, and permit costs. They will specify the type and grade of materials, whether they are using asphalt shingles, metal roofing, or a flat roof system, and they will include the manufacturer warranty terms.

If the estimate says "we will fix the leak" without specifying how, that is a problem. Leaks around a chimney, for example, often require new chimney flashing rather than a simple patch. A roofer who avoids discussing the workmanship warranty is also a red flag. Most reputable roofers offer at least a two-year workmanship warranty on repairs and a five-year or longer workmanship warranty on full replacements. If they say the manufacturer warranty covers everything, they are misleading you. The manufacturer warranty covers defects in the material, not poor installation.

The 15-Minute Background Check Every Texan Should Do

You do not need to be a private investigator to vet a roofer. Fifteen minutes and a few free online tools are enough to catch most bad actors. Start with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation website. Search the company name and the owner's name. Then check the Better Business Bureau for any unresolved complaints. Open Google Reviews and Yelp in separate tabs and sort by "most recent" and "lowest rating" first. A roofer with a 4.8 average but twenty glowing reviews from accounts with no other activity is probably gaming the system. Look for reviews that describe specific problems - workers showing up late, debris left in the yard, leaks that reappeared after the first rain.

Finally, ask the roofer for three references from jobs completed in the last twelve months. Call those references. Ask whether the roofer pulled the required City of Austin Permits, whether the job finished on time, and whether any issues came up after the final payment. If the roofer hesitates or gives you old references, that is another of the signs of a bad roofer.

The Payment Trap

How a roofer asks to be paid tells you a lot about their financial stability. A roofer who demands more than thirty percent of the total cost upfront is likely using your money to finish another job or pay off a supplier. The industry standard is a small deposit, sometimes ten to twenty percent, with progress payments tied to completed milestones. Never pay the full balance until the job is finished and you have inspected the work. If they ask for cash, walk away. Cash payments are untraceable and often signal that the roofer is not paying taxes or carrying insurance.

One roofer I worked with in Round Rock insisted on being paid in full on the first day. The homeowner refused, and the roofer left the job site with half the old roof torn off. It took two weeks and a lien notice to get them back. That kind of story is common enough that the Roofing Contractors Association of Texas advises homeowners to never pay more than the value of the materials delivered to the site.

What Happens When You Ignore the Signs

A bad roof installation does not fail all at once. It fails slowly. You might notice a musty smell in the attic first, then a small water stain on the ceiling, then a drip during the next hard rain. By the time you call a second roofer, the decking may be rotted, the insulation soaked, and the chimney flashing rusted through. The repair cost will be higher than the original job, and the manufacturer warranty on the shingles will be void because the installation was not done by an authorized contractor.

If you are considering a metal roofing system, the stakes are even higher. Metal panels require precise expansion gaps and fasteners. A roofer who treats metal roofing like asphalt shingles will leave you with oil-canning, leaky seams, and a roof that rattles in the wind. Flat roofs have their own risks: improper slope, ponding water, and blistering membranes. A roofer who quotes the same price and method for every roof type is not someone you want working on your home.

Trust Your Gut, But Verify Everything

Your intuition matters, but it should be backed by a paper trail. If a roofer shows up late, avoids eye contact, or gives vague answers about your specific roof type, those are all soft signs that something is off. Pair those impressions with the hard evidence from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, the Better Business Bureau, and the references you called. When the soft signs and the hard evidence align, you have found one of the clearest signs of a bad roofer.

The roof over your head is too important to trust to chance. A few hours of research before you sign a contract can save you thousands of dollars and years of frustration. The tools are free, the databases are public, and the time investment is minimal. The only thing standing between you and a bad hire is the willingness to look.