Loss Control Brief: Water Intrusion and Mitigation

If undetected, water-related problems can cause deterioration in buildings and can lead to the destruction of materials, finishes, and structural components. In fact, water damage is a leading cause of loss in school facilities.

Water intrusion into a building can originate from numerous sources, including building systems that supply, remove, or use water (such as HVAC equipment); the building envelope, including exterior walls, doors, windows, and the roof; and water from outside sources or an unintended inside source (e.g., sewer back-up, drains, pipe breaks, etc.).

Regardless of the source, the essential task for facilities managers is to understand the patterns of moisture accumulation and movement in order to limit potential water damage. This is known as *water mitigation*: taking steps to eliminate or reduce property damage from a severe water-related event.

The Trust's recommendations related to water intrusion and mitigation are as follows:

- Create and/or maintain a written water intrusion response and restoration plan. Among other elements, the plan should include: (1) contact information for the district employee who is designated as the lead for handling losses; (2) contact information for emergency vendors such as plumbers, sprinkler contractors, the alarm company, electricians, roofers, etc.; and (3) documentation on how to address different types of water damage.[1]
- Plan for how to handle water in the building. This may include but is not limited to having water mitigating supplies such as sandbags, dehumidifiers and absorptive materials to impede water progress inside a building; knowledge of water shutoff valves; and a plan for protecting critical property from water damage.
- Conduct regular inspections and promptly address areas where damage has occurred or is likely to occur. Pay special attention to areas of the building envelope that wear out quickly, such as sealants around windows. Ideal times for inspections are after summer and after winter, as well as after a significant storm/high wind event.
- Ensure that weep screeds (building material used along the base of an exterior stucco wall) and weep holes are working correctly and as designed. Also, ensure that appropriate drainage exists around each building and that water sheds away from the building.
- When there is water intrusion, properly diagnose the source of the water leak to prevent further damage to the surroundings.
- Periodically review applicable materials available on the Trust website (once logged in, click on the Resources & Training tab, then Training Presentations and/or Checklists).

[1] A sample water intrusion and restoration plan from Northwestern University is available here. Additional guidance from the Environmental Protection Agency is available here.