

SLATE • ROOFING • COSTS

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This essay first appeared on the slateroofcentral.com message board in response to discussions among contractors and customers about the costs of slate roof work. It is reprinted here with permission from the author.

Here's why it costs alot to have a SKILLED, QUALIFIED, INSURED, and EXPERIENCED contractor fix/repair/replace your slate/tile/flashings/box gutters:

- * Workers Comp Insurance (33-50% of an employer's labor cost)
- * Disability Insurance
- * Liability Insurance
- * Unemployment Insurance
- * Insurance for motor vehicles
- * Payments/maintenance/upkeep for work vehicle(s)
- * Health insurance (God forbid)
- * Retirement savings/401k (you mean you want to retire someday?)
- * State and Federal taxes (plus 12.4% FICA for the employer)
- * Wages for "skilled" slaters (sorry, \$12/hour isn't gonna cut it)
- * Tool/equipment replacement
- * Time and expenses incurred traveling back & forth to give potential customers "free" estimates (and then writing them after dinner!)
- * Cost of copper \$\$\$
- * Cost of slate (and procuring same)
- * Business phone/cellular/website/office supplies/website/etc (you get the point)

Look at all the "costs" I've listed associated with running a reputable business. YOU, as the consumer, EXPECT your contractor to be FULLY insured and pay taxes. You don't like the chain-smoking, scurvy looking guy in the ripped jeans, no shirt and a '78 pickup who uses the f-word in normal conversation. He ISN'T fully insured and, as for taxes, are you kidding? Cash only, baby. No, you like guys in the newer GMC's who wear shirts that say the company name on it (and rightly so.) Well, guess which outfit costs a lot more to operate?

"That seems like you're making too much!"

I had a woman once who called me from work several times to discuss a quote. She sent faxes, emails, etc. In the end, she told me she didn't like the price — she was "uncomfortable with it because [she couldn't] figure out what [we were] making an hour." When I roughly told her (wages + overhead) she freaked out... "How could a roofer be worth that much an hour?"

She was an employee of an enormous state teachers union that represents thousands of teachers. Here she is, at work, on the phone, on the computer, using the resources of HER employer to conduct PERSONAL business. What did she make per hour? Is SHE worth it? Would the inner city and rural teachers that pay hard-earned dues which finance her salary feel that it was money well spent? Why is it that people have no qualms whatsoever calling into question the wages earned by skilled tradespeople?

I can tell you that, as far as cost goes, anyone who does it by the tile, by the square, by the foot is out of their mind. I disagree with even suggesting numbers on this [web] site [slateroofcentral.com/messages]. You can explain, ad nauseum, that there are lots of factors involved (accessibility, pitch, materials, etc.), but people are going to focus on the numbers you threw up here.

A TALE OF TWO ROOFS

Consider this example: Two different roofs — each need three slates replaced. Roof #1 is 15-20 minutes away, a common "sea green" slate, and not very steep. Ladder up, put on a hook ladder at the easily accessible ridge and go. Roof #2 is a less common Monson, Maine, slate. The three replacements are up behind a dormer with a chimney coming out alongside it. To compound matters, there is no ridge to hook onto on this end of the 12/12 [45 degree] roof. Oh, yeah, this roof is 45

minutes away, and it's on a home in a historic neighborhood in a city that requires a permit and historic district commission presentation and approval prior to work.

Job number one was \$250.00. Job number two was \$2,500.00. Both are real examples, too. Both customers were comfortable with the prices because of what was involved. Both also realize the perils involved in working on a steep, smooth stone surface. There's a reason why slaters are hard to find.

SO, HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO...

...\$1,400.00 for re-flashing a chimney on a slate roof is NOT out of line. Even if it doesn't take a 2-3 man crew all day to do it, they're not going to be able to do anything else that day. And there's travel time, picking up materials, disposal of refuse, set up/break down, etc.

...Don't get all worked up trying to figure out costs and how to save \$12/pc when you're buying \$240 sheets of copper or \$145 copper leaders. How many times has a customer complained because your local supplier was 10% more than some guy "on-line" who is gonna tell you to go bang your head when the leader's dented. When a customer needs to be that involved, right down to the individual material costs and shopping around, walk away. If you, as a consumer, act that way, don't be surprised when a good contractor doesn't want to do the job for you. A good contractor isn't fleecing you to begin with. He's in demand, and he doesn't have time to deal with nonsensical customers who are trying to save \$5 here and \$10 there at his time, expense and aggravation.

...\$1,000.00 to \$2,000.00 per square to replace slate roofing is totally in line. \$1,000.00 is too low. \$1,200.00-\$1,400.00/sq for 10's or 12's is ok, more for smaller pieces. More for cut up roofs with lots of dormers, valleys, turrets, etc. Cost covers "basic" copper. This is where good judgment and fairness come into play. You want to add copper snow pans? Expect to pay. You want rolled copper ridges? You're paying for it.

...Built-in and box-style gutters: Forget about it. You're dealing with wood rot, so there's carpentry involved. You're bending and soldering metal. Slate off and on again. Masonry repairs as you pass chimneys or brick dormers, flashing as you go. You want a price per foot? You're kidding, right? Most built-ins have been neglected for years and are sold to people who want to do the right thing and restore the house. Trouble is, by the time they get in there, the work needed is extensive. Extensive rhymes with expensive. In fact, they're only one consonant apart. Coincidence?

A FINAL THOUGHT ON OWNING THE 'WORLD'S FINEST ROOF'

Slate roofs are generally on fine homes. Older homes. Expensive and historically important homes. Houses with lots of detail. Things like built-in gutters, dormers, turrets. They were built when labor wasn't so expensive, relatively speaking. Skilled tradesmen were plentiful, and hard-working. Times have changed. Upkeep and restoration are expensive. Period. But, if you are looking for the best bang for your buck, the slate roof is the fiscally responsible choice.

You go and buy a little Hyundai or Kia for under \$10k to commute to and from work in. Your expectations aren't grand. When you need some work done you'll go to Midas or JiffyLube. Now imagine owning an exotic car, like a Bentley or classic Jag or Benz. You're not bringing her in to just any garage. The guy touching your baby is skilled and well paid. He's a master of his craft, and you respect him. You've got something of real substance and value—you're going to take care of it.

If you think about it, not a far fetched analogy. 