

Preparing for winter with 'resilient' properties

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In recent years there has been significant damage to many properties as a result of harsh and persistent wintry weather. Flooding has been high up on the agenda with a national flood resilience review having been commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs earlier in the year. Any actions resulting from this review are yet to be seen but why wait when properties can become more resilient to the effects of adverse weather conditions right now.

Where properties are likely to be flooded it may be prudent to install sprayed or injected polyurethane for wall insulation to increase the property's resilience. If the house is exposed to flood waters, the cavity or solid wall insulation, will not be damaged and will not need removal or replacement. In comparison a standard method of cavity insulation such as a fibre insulant would become waterlogged within the cavity. This is expensive to remove and the walls take a lot longer to dry out.

The application of polyurethane helps to prevent water tracking through the wall and damaging the structure, wall ties and internal finishes. Closed cell materials retain their integrity and have low moisture take-up. Using a closed cell foam makes repairs a lot easier, less costly and quicker to carry out and the home owners can then move back in much sooner, causing less disruption.

Polyurethane foam also provides a superior performing insulant which helps to bond the inner and outer leaves to provide strength to the structure. Air leakage through the cavity can be reduced to zero. Because of the greater thermal performance and the reduced air leakage polyurethane foam outperforms all other forms of cavity fill.

In severe or coastal exposure zones more conventional cavity insulation materials may not be an option as the exposure ratings may make them unsuitable. However, the moisture impermeable, non-slumping properties of polyurethane foam enables it to be installed in all exposure zones.

Roofs can be particularly vulnerable to wind, rain and stormy conditions. To strengthen and help weatherproof the structure polyurethane foam can be sprayed to the underside of tiles. The material is used for the dual purpose of insulation and stabilisation, for instance in cases where the nails have degraded over time. Air leakage through the roof covering can be reduced down to zero with in-situ applied polyurethane.

Closed cell polyurethane foam for building insulation has been around for over 30 years. The polyurethane insulant is a two-component liquid system which produces a highly-efficient blanket of insulation with an exceptional thermal conductivity figure. In shops and warehouses large areas can be installed very quickly. Systems can be applied to various depths and have K-values in the range of 0.025 to 0.028W/mK.

Where polyurethane foam insulation is applied to an existing roof this is subject to a site survey as the roof needs to be structurally sound prior to installation. A professional installer will undertake a survey and remedial works before spraying the insulant.

Specifiers can find professional installers offering excellent advice and quality installations from the British Urethane Foam Contractors Association website. This is the national trade association representing installers of sprayed and injected polyurethane foam. Installers have to ensure that high standards are maintained and work to the association's Code of Professional Practice.

There is a twenty-five year insurance warranty which BUFGA installer members can offer for domestic injected polyurethane cavity wall insulation projects. The warranty offers reassurance to customers and becomes effective if there is a fault with the installation and the installer has ceased to trade or cannot honour the guarantee.

Making properties more resilient to stormy, wintry weather may not be an onerous task. The installation of polyurethane is simple to do although it must be carried out by a professional installer, preferably a member of BUFGA. This winter property protection should certainly be high up the list to defend against increasingly erratic weather conditions!

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