

Disclaimer:

These blog posts were originally written for GAF Energy. Following the company's acquisition, not all content transferred to the new site. I am sharing these posts here via Google Docs to showcase my writing work. All content displayed reflects my original authorship.

Solar Roofing Safety Spotlight: Weather

When working on solar roofs, weather is a major focus for safety concerns. As the weather gets colder across the U.S., it's important to know how best to safely operate under changes in conditions like temperature, precipitation, and daylight. Jared Vaught is responsible for the health and safety program at GAF Energy, and according to Jared, "there are risks in this business that can impact people's lives, so safety at GAF Energy is about controlling the risk and eliminating or minimizing the negative impacts that injuries and illnesses at work have to our people first and foremost—we want to provide a workplace where people can have long and healthy careers."

We sat down with Jared to ask him questions about solar roofing safety at GAF Energy, specifically on the topic of weather.

GAF Energy: Since GAF Energy workers are often outside, how does weather impact safety precautions?

Jared: We constantly consider the weather when planning for the safety of workers in the field, especially extreme heat or cold. Weather is ever-changing and we have to consider the current and future weather conditions, and implement safety controls in a way that can be flexible as conditions change. We're concerned about the actual high or low temperature outdoors, as well as how often we are using shade to cool down or warming measures, taking rest breaks to recover from the physical nature of the work and to hydrate and replenish the body. We focus on sticking to a "work, rest, hydrate" schedule based on the weather conditions, and we adjust the timing of work and rest periods based on the temperature and humidity as well as the physical workload. If we're taking a short walk outside and it's 100 degrees, that's probably not too big of a deal because we can recover quickly and sustain a low level of exertion successfully for a longer period of time than we could if we were performing heavier physical activities in those same conditions. All to say that the level of physical exertion is an important factor in how the body is able to manage recovery and we have to be aware of that and adjust accordingly.

GAF Energy: How do you make sure individuals aren't working too long?

Jared: We typically prefer to avoid performing high risk work in low light conditions, such as working at heights. A good rule of thumb is to plan for work to happen between the posted sunrise and sunset times for a given day—we can see this in a basic smartphone weather app, so it's easy to monitor. In an emergency situation where we may have to work outside these times, we'd have to have supplemental lighting and possibly other safety controls in place such as after hours medical care available in close proximity.

GAF Energy: How do you maintain a smooth transition between seasons and communicate changing weather and outdoor-related safety challenges?

Jared: We put together and promote a twice-yearly—what we call a 'Safety Recharge' event, in the spring and fall, which is a cyclical safety training and coordination event that gives our work teams the chance to outfit and engage on key topics relevant to the warmer spring and cooler winter times of year. So going into the spring, around April, we prepare for summer-related outdoor risks such as longer days and hotter temperatures (for example, we campaign on heat stress avoidance during our '101 Critical Days of Summer' between Memorial and Labor Day holidays). And approximately six months later, in October, we do the same focus on challenges with shorter and colder days; this twice-yearly plan provides us an opportunity for necessary training or refreshing on key seasonal safety challenges, and gives us a time to pause and reaffirm to ourselves and each other our commitment to working safely and efficiently year round.

GAF Energy: Now that winter is here, what's your philosophy for "ending the year right" and starting off the new year in the best way?

Jared: Staying present. Being mindful. Not letting your guard down. I think that the end-of-year holiday season—starting around Halloween and carrying through the New Year—is an easy time to connect 'safety at work' with what we work toward and for throughout the year: friends, family, coworkers, vacations, and things like that. It provides an easy lead-in to why we work safely.

GAF Energy takes worker safety very seriously. Jared and his team are always conscientious about providing the tools and empowering teams to identify and control safety hazards at work. All GAF Energy teams are properly trained in how to assess safety in their work and use their tools and equipment to prevent, respond to, and learn from safety events. GAF Energy's commitment to workplace safety is one of the ways we are able to work toward our vision of energy from every roof.