

composite decking starts at about \$1.65 per lineal foot. Decking dealers tell us that the types that typically are purchased most often fetch about \$2.65 per lineal foot, or around \$833 for an average 12-by-12 deck (board widths vary slightly from brand to brand). However, the least expensive capstock boards start at about \$3.25 per lineal foot (and go as high as \$4.25), or around \$1,021 for the same size deck. At \$3.25 per lineal foot, that means that you'll pay around \$188 extra for a deck that's composed of the least expensive capstock compared with the most common standard composite (and \$502 more than the least expensive regular composite decking).

Because of the price difference, regular composite decking, despite all of its flaws, still is widely available. As capstock matures and possibly comes down in cost, traditional composites might fall by the wayside. However, we don't expect to see that happening any time soon, because most manufacturers say they will continue to offer traditional composites as a low-cost alternative.

RAISE THE ROOF. If you shopped as recently as 2 years ago for asphalt shingles, which still are the most common type of roofing that's installed, then you know that manufacturers offered the longest warranties only on their premium products. That's changed. Now, lifetime warranties for three of the four major manufacturers' shingles appear on all but the least expensive products.

Based on a review of a distributor's data, the upgrade involves at least 12 shingle products. GAF, which started the lifetime-warranty trend as of Jan. 1, 2011, upgraded five products. We found that CertainTeed, which says it always has had some lifetime warranties, upgraded five shingle styles to that level since 2009. Owens Corning, which joined the lifetime-warranty surge Jan. 24, 2011, upgraded two shingle products to lifetime warranties since 2010.

The minimum cost for shingles that have lifetime warranties now starts at about \$98 per square, which covers 100 square feet of roof surface. No manufacturer or distributor could tell us the cost of shingles that had a lifetime warranty in 2010, before the expansion of

Catch a Breath: A Smog-Eating Roof?

Last December, Boral Roofing announced national distribution for a roofing product that's aimed at cleaning up the environment. The company's BoralPure roof tiles contain titanium dioxide, which the company says neutralizes the nitrogen oxide particles that are found in smog. The company claims that over a 1-year period, a typical 2,000-square-foot roof that's clad with its BoralPure tiles can neutralize about the same amount of nitrogen oxide as a single car produces from being driven 10,800 miles.

But before you write a check for the extra 25 percent that this product costs over regular roof tiles, you should be aware that unless you live in an urban area that's known for smog issues, BoralPure tiles will do little to improve the environment. "Of course, if you're going to remove smog, you need smog in the first place," admits John Renowden of Boral.

But Renowden suggests that the product could have an effect if it were used widely enough. "It's a bit like a catalytic converter in a car. If you're the only one who has a catalytic converter, then it doesn't make a lot of difference. But as [cars] all have catalytic converters these days, they make a considerable difference."

Chemists and environmental scientists with whom we spoke are less enthusiastic about the innovation. They tell Consumers Digest that, although it's possible that the product might work based on its material makeup, the expected effect that smog-eating roof tiles would make would be negligible.

lifetime warranties.

The fourth major player, TAMKO, didn't increase overall warranties, but on Feb. 1, 2011, it expanded its startup coverage, which is the period in which manufacturers pay both for materials and labor for replacement shingles, to 15 or 20 years from 5–10 years, depending on the product. Other manufacturers have 10-year startup periods. (All manufacturers have 3- or 5-year startup coverage on their least expensive shingles.)

Further, manufacturers wouldn't say why they made the move, but it didn't seem to correspond with significant product innovation. GAF changed the composition of the materials that go into its asphalt shingles in 2007 by reformulating its fiberglass mat and its adhesives. GAF then applied the new formula to all of its shingles in 2010. The new formula uses less asphalt and limestone than previous versions did, but GAF says the lighter shingles are more durable, although it was coy on what makes them more durable.

Owens Corning says it re-engineered the fiberglass matting in its shingles as well as improved how well that its asphalt and sealants withstand weather. The company was vague on the timing and other details of those changes but says no material changes accompanied the warranty upgrade. CertainTeed and

TAMKO say they haven't changed their asphalt shingles.

You should be aware that the change to a lifetime warranty was applied to all new products retroactively—even those that might have sat on store shelves for months. So if you purchased shingles in 2011, and the package didn't include a lifetime warranty, you might be in luck. GAF upgraded its warranty to include any of its shingles that were installed on or after Jan. 1, 2011. Despite what the product packaging might have said, those installed shingles have lifetime coverage now. Owens Corning automatically increased its coverage effective Jan. 24, 2011, and TAMKO changed its warranties starting Feb. 1, 2011. You should check the manufacturer's website to determine whether your shingles are among those that were upgraded to lifetime coverage. If so, you're entitled to an automatic upgrade if your purchase falls on or after those dates.

We applaud the move, but the improved peace of mind still comes at a premium. The least expensive shingles that have lifetime warranties—\$98 per square—cost \$2,352 for a typical 2,400-square-foot roof. By contrast, the least expensive shingles that carry a 20-year warranty cost \$81 per square, or \$1,944 for a typical roof.

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