

Topping Mother Nature

Gutter Topper Designed to Solve Drainage Problems

by Josh Marx

From ancient manmade structures to the latest examples of modern architecture, building drainage systems have been rendered useless by *Aceraceae ger-*
men — the dreaded Maple seed, whose

swarms are known to homeowners everywhere as “helicopters.” Preventing drainage problems caused by seeds, leaves and other debris was the goal of Tony Iannelli, who invented Gutter Topper®.

Gutter Topper is a self-cleaning metal cover system that installs over existing gutters to prevent almost anything but water from collecting in gutter troughs. In the decade since its 1996 conception, Gutter Topper has grown into a \$60 million a year corporation. From its headquarters outside of Cincinnati in Amelia, Ohio, the company operates a national network of independent dealers in 140 exclusive territories across the United States and Canada. Its 43,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Batavia, Ohio, is capable of producing over 25 million feet of Gutter Topper product each year. With more than 200,000 residential installations in the last five years, large-market dealers generate million-dollar revenues of their own. The root of this success? A gutter protection product that actually seems to work.

“My partner and I investigated a lot of different covers,” states Richard Breedlove, co-founder of On-Site Gutters in Redding, Calif. “From its



■ The company's 43,000-square-foot manufacturing facility is designed to fill product orders within a 24-hour turnaround time.

Product Profile



■ Gutter Topper improves curb appeal by matching different colors and materials and creating a sleek roofline.

lifetime warranty to its design, Gutter Topper was by far the superior product.” Iannelli devised his patented system after more than 25 years of firsthand experience in the gutter and gutter cover business.

“Some systems require the same maintenance as gutters or can clog easily or buckle under summer heat or winter snow loads,” states Iannelli. “They can have unsightly brackets or foster bird nesting.” He devised Gutter Topper specifically as a solution to these issues.

Minimizing Maintenance

The priority function of a gutter protection system is to keep nature at bay, which in turn, keeps customers off their ladders. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 175,000 ladder falls occur annually, resulting in 300 deaths. “We sell safety first,” says Mark Barak, product and sales consultant for A&J Reliable Inc., a Gutter Topper dealer since 1996. “I had an emergency room nurse call me after all of the roofing fall accidents she had seen.”

Gutter Topper minimizes gutter cleaning by extending a solid cover from under the second row of shingles across the entire gutter width. The product performs an S-curve over the edge of the gutter before attaching to its outer lip. Water flows out, over, and back up under the beveled edge before passing through narrow pre-adjusted slits and into the gutter. The system relies on surface tension, a principle of physics that states water will flow along curved contours. The principle does not apply to waterborne debris, which the company claims washes over the cover’s edge and falls harmlessly to the ground. A no-drip edge keeps wayward flow from escaping.

“Our vice-president, John Shepitka, is a mechanical engineer,” says Andrew Gallina, president of A&J Reliable in Spring Valley, N.Y. “We chose Gutter Topper because it’s the best design out there.”

Durable Performance

The cover’s unique design adds to its functionality and durability. “Because it fastens to both the roof and the gut-

ter, it’s the only cover product I know of that makes the gutter system stronger,” states Reid Ribble, owner of Ribble Group Inc. and a past president of the National Roofing Contractors Association.

Consisting of 0.024 aluminum or 16-ounce copper, Gutter Topper guarantees its durability with a lifetime performance warranty that is transferable with the deed to the property. The company can offer the warranty because of the product’s successful performance in severe weather trials. The company commissioned PRI Asphalt Technologies, an independent construction product-testing laboratory in Tampa, Fla., to measure Gutter Topper’s effectiveness. PRI certified it could handle 22 inches of rainfall per hour and support up to 1,200 pounds per square foot with 95 percent recovery from deflection. After 2,000 hours of accelerated weathering, PRI indicated the product showed no chipping, blistering or other surface changes. It also certified Gutter Topper as meeting Dade County standards with a wind resistance of 110 mph with no lifting or movement of components.

Curb Appeal

Gutter Topper’s low profile also increases curb appeal. No unsightly brackets or hangers are required; the product fits under the second layer of shingles creating a sleek roofline. “Without a perfect match, other gutter covers that sit over the top of shingles are a total eyesore,” explains Ribble. “From the ground, only Gutter Topper’s nose is visible.”

The company demonstrates its ability to ensure color compatibility on its interactive Web site. Visitors can compare the 13 colors of aluminum Gutter Topper or solid copper with various roof and gutter color combinations. The premium polyester paint finish is baked on at 650°F and has a limited 20-year warranty. Appearance is further enhanced by the product’s patented BirdGuard® feature, which prohibits avian and animal nesting alike.

Easy Installation

For the benefit of both installers and sales representatives, Gutter Topper fits over existing gutters rather than

replacing them. The preformed sections are manufactured in 5-foot lengths to fit standard 5-inch or 6-inch gutters. The factory can custom-fit special applications as needed. The size of the openings is pre-adjusted, while the pitch angle is tailored on site. Gutter Topper's double-reinforced edge snaps onto the gutter's lip and is secured with color-coordinated, stainless steel zip screws. More of the same fasteners are used to interlock the sections where they meet at a 1-inch overlap. The entire system is secured to the roof by galvanized screws and sealed under the shingles.

"My business is 90 percent retrofit, and Gutter Topper is a good fit for our business," says Ribble.

Marketing Support

After honing their product, Iannelli and CEO Slate Kirk have poured their effort into marketing it. Dealers are provided TV, radio and print advertising and a custom interactive Web site. Product displays, yard signs, door hangers, direct mail pieces, brochures, truck decals and other options are also available. "With the product's sharp appearance, we always do proximity marketing," says Ribble. "The 50 closest homes will get a postcard."

"I'm obsessed with the unsolicited lead," confesses Gallina. "When a past customer has a barbeque, I want

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them to talk about us." He goes on to explain that any interested friends and neighbors within A&J's exclusive territory are his favorite sales prospects.




☒ Gutter Topper is designed to improve gutter strength by attaching to both the roof and the outer lip of the gutter.

"By the time my salespeople talk to them, it's a slam dunk."

Dealer Training

The latest marketing techniques are only part of Gutter Topper's annual regional training meeting. Dealers and their employees receive hands-on installation training and instructional sessions. A training center at the corporate headquarters is also open year-round. The company maintains a toll-free technical support line for questions on and off the jobsite.

"The support we get from the corporate office is just incredible," says Breedlove. "Tony and Slate have been great and are open to our suggestions and ideas."

The sessions have proved productive. The company's new Leaf Terminator product is a gutter guard for commercial structures. The challenge in the commercial arena is to identify and reach viable markets efficiently, since many commercial buildings are tall and surrounded by parking lots. Dealers learned to target schools, not just for their low profiles and proximity to trees, but for Leaf Terminator's effectiveness against bats, balls and bottles. 

*For more information,
call 800-915-5888 or
visit www.guttertopper.com.*



■ Gutter Topper conducts installation and marketing training at its corporate headquarters in Amelia, Ohio.