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Weather, Congress Among Variables Likely to Affect Industry in the Year Ahead

JANUARY 28, 2019 BY [JARED O. BLUM](#) [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

As we move forward in 2019, the roofing industry can expect to be influenced by two sometimes out-of-control, difficult to predict forces: the weather and the United States Congress. Add to the equation a shifting economic outlook, as well as uncertain immigration policies, and you have a potentially toxic mix that makes any projection difficult. But there are some constants in the current environment that can help guide strategies for the roofing industry, and here's our take on what to expect as this decade winds to a close.

There may be some limited success in tackling immigration reform, but don't expect enough change to mitigate the labor shortage experienced by roofing companies. The Trump-promised wall has yet to be built, but actions to slow illegal immigration have been somewhat successful. The roofing industry has pressed for immigration reform; experts estimate that worker shortages account for up to 20 percent in lost roofing business each year, and sensible immigration reform could help end those shortages. The Center for Construction Research and Training, or CPWR, points out that in some construction occupations, including roofing, more than half of the workers are of Hispanic origin. So, the roofing industry certainly has a compelling case to be made for reform.

Balancing the demand for secure borders against the need for additional workers has so far failed to produce meaningful legislation. Given the intense disagreement on how to move forward, 2019 will most likely be another year of bipartisan gridlock on this issue. The encouraging news comes from two areas of activity: innovations that promote ease of roofing installation, and industry efforts to certify roofing workers and increase the prestige of working in the trades. These efforts may help to recoup some of the business that has been lost because of the labor shortage, but only rational immigration reform will help to meet the unmet demand.

The weather may, in fact, be more predictable than the lawmakers who just assembled on Capitol Hill. Late in November of this past year, the Federal Government released the National Climate Assessment, the fourth comprehensive look at climate-change impacts on the United States since 2000. The Congressionally mandated thousand-page report delivered a sobering warning about the impact of climate change on the United States and its economy, detailing how natural disasters are becoming more commonplace throughout the country and predicting that they may become much worse.

While some may challenge the reality of long-term climate change, statistics tell us that short-term increases in cataclysmic weather events are an indisputable fact of life. And a temporary lull in these disasters cannot be taken as a sign of a change in weather patterns. For instance, as of

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early August this past year, the Tropical Meteorology Team at Colorado State University downgraded the forecast for the rest of the year, until November 1, from “slightly above average Atlantic hurricane season” to less than anticipated. They were correct, for a while. No hurricanes formed in the Atlantic during the rest of August, making it the first season in five years without a storm of hurricane magnitude. But just as forecasters were declaring victory over unpredictable nature, Hurricane Florence delivered a pounding to the Carolinas in early September, and in October Hurricane Michael devastated much of the Florida panhandle. The erratic weather patterns did not stop at the end of the hurricane season: an early December storm dumped as much as a foot of snow on parts of the Carolinas that rarely see that much during an entire winter. So much for the predicted respite from extreme weather conditions.

The difficult-to-predict weather is creating one certainty for the roofing industry: customers will increasingly be looking for durable materials and systems that can withstand weather extremes. Additionally, the focus is turning to anticipating destructive weather and mitigating its potential impact by creating resilient structures. ERA has just produced its first annual report, “Building Resilience: The Roofing Perspective.” We anticipate updating this product each year to help provide the roofing industry with the latest approaches to creating resilient roofing systems.

Unpredictable labor markets and unpredictable weather patterns are defining the “new normal” for our industry and will no doubt be part of our reality in 2019. But based on past performance, there’s at least one certainty we can count on: the roofing industry will come out ahead in the face of these challenges, providing our customers with innovative products and superior service and providing our employees with a work environment that ensures a secure future.

About the Author: Jared Blum is the executive director of the EPDM Roofing Association (ERA), www.epdmroofs.org, and serves as chair of the Environmental and Energy Study Institute.

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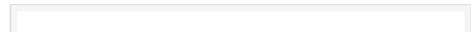
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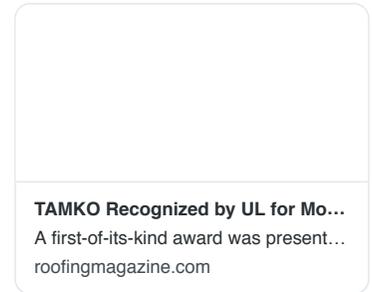
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