

A Practical Guide to Skylight Leak Fix and Prevention

Skylights bring natural light into a home, but when they leak, the damage can be extensive. Over the years, I have traced hundreds of roof leaks across Cape Town, and skylights consistently rank among the trickiest to fix. The problem is rarely the glass itself. It is almost always the flashing, the sealant, or the way the skylight was installed. A proper skylight leak fix starts with accurate tracing, not a quick dab of silicone.

Before any repair work begins, you need to understand what is happening above the ceiling. Water can travel a long way along a rafter or a membrane before it finally drips onto your floor. That is why a good waterproofing contractor will always start by inspecting the roof, the skylight curb, and the surrounding tiles or sheeting. Without that step, you risk patching the wrong spot.

This article walks through the common causes of skylight leaks, the right way to approach a **skylight leak fix**, and what to expect from a professional roofer. The goal is to help you make informed decisions, not to sell you a product.

Why Skylights Leak

Skylights are essentially holes in your roof. They require careful integration with the roofing material, and any weak point in that integration becomes a leak path. The most common causes I see are:

- Failed sealant around the skylight frame. UV exposure and thermal movement cause silicone and butyl tape to crack over time.
- Improper flashing installation. The metal or rubber flashing that diverts water around the skylight may be too short, incorrectly overlapped, or missing entirely on one side.
- Damaged or missing roof tiles around the skylight. A cracked tile or a gap in the sheeting can channel water straight onto the skylight curb.
- Condensation trapped under the skylight dome. This is often mistaken for a leak but is actually moisture from inside the home.
- Poorly sealed screw penetrations. Every screw holding the skylight frame or flashing in place is a potential entry point for water.

Each of these problems requires a different approach. That is why a blanket fix, like smearing sealant over everything, rarely works for long.



Accurate Tracing: The First Step

I cannot stress this enough: find the exact entry point before you buy any materials. A common mistake is to look at the water stain on the ceiling and assume the leak is directly above it. In reality, water can run horizontally along a rafter for over a metre before it finds a gap to drip through.

The best way to trace a skylight leak is to wait for a dry day, then simulate rain with a garden hose. Start by wetting the lowest part of the skylight area and gradually move upward. Watch the interior for the first sign of moisture. That tells you the precise height and side where the water is breaching the roof. Mark that spot with chalk. This method saves time and prevents unnecessary stripping of the roof.

I once worked on a home in Hout Bay where the homeowner had already replaced the entire skylight dome and still had a leak. When I did a hose test, the water was actually entering through a gap in the roof sheeting two metres uphill from the skylight, then running under the tiles and over the skylight curb. The skylight itself was fine. The fix was a simple patch in the sheeting and a new flashing step. That is the value of accurate tracing.

Materials Matter for a Lasting Skylight Leak Fix

Once you have pinpointed the source, the next decision is what materials to use. Not all sealants are equal, and using the wrong one can cause the leak to return within months. For skylight work, I prefer a high-quality polyurethane or hybrid sealant that stays flexible and bonds well to both metal and plastic. Silicone can work, but it does not paint over and tends to collect dirt, which can lead to failure over time.

Flashing materials also matter. If the original flashing is aluminium, check for corrosion, especially in coastal areas like Cape Town where salt air accelerates decay. In some cases, replacing a section of flashing with powder-coated steel or a self-adhesive rubberised membrane provides a longer-lasting result. The key is to create a continuous waterproof barrier that sheds water outward, never allowing it to pond against a joint.

For the skylight curb itself, if the wood or metal frame is rotted or rusted, you cannot just seal over it. The damaged section must be cut out and replaced. A temporary patch will only hide the problem until the next big storm. A proper **skylight leak fix** addresses the structural weakness, not just the symptom.



Transparent Pricing: What to Expect

One concern I hear often from homeowners is that roofers give vague quotes over the phone and then add charges once they see the job. That is why transparent pricing matters. A reputable waterproofing company should be able to give you a clear breakdown: the cost of the site inspection and tracing, the cost of materials, and the hourly or fixed rate for the repair work. If a contractor refuses to explain what the price covers, look elsewhere.

For a typical [skylight leak fix](#), the range in Cape Town is roughly R1 500 to R3 500 for a straightforward reseal and flashing adjustment. If the curb needs rebuilding or the skylight needs to be replaced entirely, the cost can climb to R6 000 or more. Always ask for a written quote that specifies the work scope. That protects both you and the contractor.

Prevention: Stop Leaks Before They Start

Preventive maintenance is cheaper than emergency repairs. Here are a few things you can check yourself twice a year, ideally before winter:

- Look for cracks or gaps in the sealant around the skylight frame. If you see any, have them addressed before water gets in.
- Clear debris like leaves and pine needles from around the skylight. Trapped organic matter holds moisture and accelerates sealant breakdown.
- Check that the roof tiles or sheets around the skylight are intact and properly seated. A single displaced tile can funnel water directly to the skylight.
- If your skylight has a flashing skirt, ensure it is still tightly attached and not lifting at the edges.

These simple checks can save you thousands in water damage and mould remediation. And if you do spot a problem, call a professional early. A small leak that is ignored for a season can rot the roof deck and require a full skylight replacement.

I have seen too many homeowners try a DIY skylight leak fix with a tube of silicone from the hardware store, only to have the leak reappear after a few weeks of Cape Town wind and rain. The wind drives water into gaps that still silicone cannot bridge. A lasting repair requires the right material, applied to a clean, dry surface, with proper overlap and drainage.

When to Replace vs. Repair

Not every skylight can be saved. If the dome is crazed, yellowed, or cracked, or if the curb is severely rotted, replacement is the only sensible option. A new skylight unit, installed correctly

with modern flashing and sealant, will outlast any patch job. The upfront cost is higher, but the peace of mind is worth it.



On the other hand, if the skylight is less than ten years old and the only issue is a failed seal or a small flashing gap, a targeted repair is almost always the better choice. The key is to match the repair method to the actual cause. That is why I always recommend a hose test before any work begins. It prevents guesswork and ensures you are paying for a fix that actually targets the leak.

To sum it up, a successful **skylight leak fix** depends on three things: accurate diagnosis, quality materials, and honest workmanship. If you keep those in mind, you will save time, money, and frustration. And if you are in Cape Town, you already know that our weather does not forgive a half-done job.