

OTTAWA TILING

Shower & Waterproofing

Shower tile and waterproofing guidance for Ottawa bathrooms, covering membrane systems, curb construction, drain placement and vapour barriers. Prevent costly water damage in your Ottawa home.

6 Expert Answers from Tile IQ

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Q1

What is the cost to rebuild a leaking Ottawa shower from the studs out with proper waterproofing?

A complete shower rebuild from the studs out in Ottawa typically costs \$8,000 to \$18,000, with most homeowners spending \$12,000 to \$15,000 for a standard 36-inch by 60-inch shower with mid-range finishes. This wide range reflects the dramatic difference between a basic rebuild with standard porcelain tile and a luxury installation with large-format natural stone, multiple niches, and premium fixtures.

The high cost reflects the extensive work required for a proper rebuild. Once you're down to the studs, everything must be rebuilt to current standards: new electrical rough-in for lighting and heated floors (\$800 to \$1,500), plumbing rough-in including moving the drain if needed (\$1,200 to \$3,000), insulation and vapour barrier (\$300 to \$600), cement board or foam backer board substrate (\$600 to \$1,200), complete waterproofing membrane system (\$800 to \$1,500), tile installation (\$2,000 to \$6,000 depending on tile choice), plumbing fixtures and trim (\$1,500 to \$4,000), and finishing work including caulking and cleanup (\$500 to \$1,000).

Ottawa's climate makes proper waterproofing absolutely critical in this rebuild. The dramatic humidity swings between our bone-dry winters and humid summers create challenging conditions for any moisture barrier. A quality waterproofing system like Schluter Kerdi or RedGard liquid membrane is non-negotiable — this is your one opportunity to do it right. The waterproofing must extend behind the entire shower area, properly seal all corners and penetrations, and integrate with a waterproof shower pan or linear drain system.

Material choices significantly impact the final cost. Standard 12-inch porcelain tile with basic fixtures keeps costs toward the lower end, while large-format natural stone, custom niches, rainfall showerheads, and heated floors push costs toward the upper range. Many Ottawa homeowners add heated floors during a complete rebuild since the electrical rough-in is already exposed — this adds \$1,200 to \$2,500 but transforms the shower experience during our long winters.

The silver lining of a complete rebuild is that everything will be new, properly waterproofed, and warrantied. Unlike a patch job that might fail again in a few years, a proper rebuild should last 20 to 30 years with routine maintenance. When you're ready to move forward with quotes, you can browse experienced shower renovation contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare approaches and pricing for your specific project.

Q2

How much does it cost to add a second shower head to an existing tiled shower in Ottawa?

Adding a second shower head to an existing tiled shower in Ottawa typically costs \$800 to \$2,500, depending on whether you're adding a handheld unit to the existing valve or installing a completely separate shower system. The wide price range reflects the complexity difference between these two approaches and the extent of tile work required.

The most straightforward option is adding a handheld shower head that connects to your existing shower valve through a diverter or slide bar system. This requires minimal tile disruption — usually just drilling one or two holes through the tile for mounting brackets. Professional installation runs \$300 to \$800 including the handheld unit, slide bar, and labour. The tile work is minimal but critical — drilling through tile requires diamond-tipped hole saws and careful technique to avoid cracking, especially with porcelain or natural stone.

Installing a completely separate second shower head — like a rainfall head or body spray — requires running new plumbing lines behind the tile, which means opening up the shower wall. This is major renovation work that involves removing tile sections, installing new plumbing rough-in, waterproofing the opened areas with membrane systems like Schluter Kerdi, and retiling the affected sections. Professional installation runs \$1,500 to \$4,000 including plumbing, waterproofing, and tile repair work. The challenge is matching your existing tile — if your shower is more than a few years old, finding exact matches can be difficult or impossible.

Critical considerations for Ottawa installations: Any plumbing work requires a licensed plumber and city permits. The waterproofing behind your existing tile must be maintained or upgraded during any wall penetration — cutting corners here leads to expensive water damage. If your shower uses natural stone or large-format porcelain, tile repair work is more complex and costly. Ottawa's extreme temperature swings make proper waterproofing even more critical than in milder climates.

The most cost-effective approach is often the handheld shower addition, which provides excellent functionality with minimal disruption to your existing tile work. When you're ready to explore options, you can browse experienced plumbers and tile repair specialists through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to get specific quotes based on your shower's configuration and tile type.

Q3

How do Ottawa shower tilers prevent water from wicking behind the tile at the shower curb?

The shower curb is the most vulnerable point in any tiled shower installation, and preventing water infiltration there requires a multi-layered approach that starts with proper waterproofing before any tile goes up. Professional tile installers in Ottawa use a continuous waterproof membrane that wraps over the curb and extends up the walls at least 6 inches, creating an unbroken barrier that water cannot penetrate even if it gets past the tile and grout.

The foundation of curb waterproofing is the membrane system itself. Schluter Kerdi is the most common choice among Ottawa tile professionals — it's a polyethylene sheet membrane that bonds to the substrate with unmodified thinset, creating a fully waterproof barrier. The membrane must be carefully detailed at the curb, wrapping over the top and down both sides with proper overlaps at corners and transitions. Liquid-applied membranes like RedGard or Hydroban are also effective, particularly for complex curb geometries, and are painted on in multiple coats to achieve the required mil thickness.

Critical details make the difference between a watertight curb and a future leak. The membrane must extend continuously from the shower floor, up and over the curb, and onto the bathroom floor on the outside — there cannot be any breaks or gaps. Inside corners where the curb meets the walls require fabric reinforcement strips embedded in the membrane to prevent cracking. The curb top must slope slightly toward the shower interior (about 1/8 inch per foot) to shed water, and this slope must be built into the substrate before the membrane is applied.

Tile installation on the curb requires specific techniques to maintain the waterproof barrier. The tile layout should minimize cuts and joints on the curb top, as every grout joint is a potential water entry point. Many Ottawa installers prefer to use a single piece of natural stone or large-format porcelain for the curb cap when possible. When multiple pieces are necessary, the joints must be perfectly aligned and sealed. The thinset used over the membrane must be unmodified (polymer-modified thinset can interfere with membrane bonding), and coverage must be complete — any voids under the tile can allow water to pool against the membrane.

The final line of defense is proper caulking and grout selection. Where the curb tile meets the shower door track or threshold, 100% silicone caulk creates a flexible, waterproof seal that accommodates seasonal movement. The grout joints on the curb should use a high-quality sanded grout that's been properly sealed, or better yet, epoxy grout that never needs sealing and is completely waterproof. In Ottawa's climate, where humidity swings cause materials to expand and contract seasonally, these flexible seals are essential.

When you're ready to hire a professional for shower tile work, you can browse experienced tile installers through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory — proper curb waterproofing is complex enough that it's worth investing in a contractor who understands these critical details.

How much does a steam shower waterproofing and tiling project cost in an Ottawa master bathroom?

A steam shower waterproofing and tiling project in an Ottawa master bathroom typically costs \$8,000 to \$20,000, with most projects falling in the \$12,000 to \$16,000 range for a standard-sized steam enclosure. The wide range reflects variables like steam shower size, tile selection, complexity of the design, and whether you're converting an existing shower or building from scratch.

Steam showers present unique challenges in Ottawa's climate that drive costs higher than standard shower installations. The extreme humidity generated by steam (approaching 100 percent) combined with Ottawa's dry winter heating season creates massive humidity swings that stress waterproofing systems and grout. Steam also reaches temperatures of 110 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, which accelerates any moisture infiltration and magnifies the consequences of waterproofing failures. A failed steam shower waterproofing system can cause \$15,000 to \$30,000 in structural damage as steam penetrates wall cavities and reaches the framing.

The waterproofing system alone accounts for \$2,000 to \$4,000 of the project cost and must be absolutely flawless. Steam showers require a fully sealed vapor barrier system — typically Schluter Kerdi or a liquid-applied membrane like RedGard applied to all six surfaces (four walls, ceiling, and floor). Every penetration for steam heads, controls, lighting, and accessories must be properly sealed with compatible gaskets and membranes. The ceiling requires special attention since steam rises and condenses on the coolest surface — inadequate ceiling waterproofing is the most common failure point in steam shower installations.

Tile selection significantly impacts costs. Porcelain tile (\$5 to \$15 per square foot) handles steam conditions well and offers the best value. Natural stone like marble or granite (\$15 to \$40 per square foot) creates stunning steam rooms but requires professional sealing and ongoing maintenance. Large-format tiles minimize grout joints, which reduces maintenance in the high-humidity environment. Mosaic tiles create more grout lines that require meticulous sealing. All grout in steam showers should be epoxy grout (\$3 to \$5 per square foot additional) rather than cementitious grout — epoxy is waterproof and won't deteriorate in constant high humidity.

Installation labor runs \$15 to \$25 per square foot due to the precision required for waterproofing and the complexity of integrating steam equipment. The steam generator itself (\$2,000 to \$6,000) requires a dedicated electrical circuit installed by an ESA-licensed electrician, proper drainage for the condensate line, and integration with the home's ventilation system. Ventilation is critical in Ottawa homes to prevent condensation issues elsewhere in the house during winter months.

When you're ready to move forward with a steam shower project, you can browse experienced tile contractors and waterproofing specialists through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory

to compare options and get detailed quotes for your specific space and requirements.

Q5

How long should a waterproofed shower pan hold water during a flood test under Ontario code?

The Ontario Building Code requires a waterproofed shower pan to hold water for a minimum of 24 hours during a flood test without any visible leakage. The test involves plugging the drain and filling the shower pan with water to the height of the curb or threshold, then monitoring for any water loss or signs of leakage below the shower area.

In Ottawa's construction environment, this 24-hour flood test is absolutely critical because our extreme freeze-thaw cycles make any water penetration behind the tile catastrophic. Even a tiny leak that might be manageable in a milder climate becomes a major structural problem when that trapped water freezes and expands during Ottawa's -25°C winter nights. The expansion forces can crack foundation walls, damage floor joists, and create mold conditions that persist long after the visible damage is repaired.

The flood test should be performed after the waterproofing membrane is installed but before any tile work begins. This means testing the Schluter Kerdi, RedGard, or other membrane system along with the properly sloped mud bed or pre-formed shower pan. The water level should reach the lowest point where water could potentially escape - typically the height of the curb or the bottom of any shower door track. Any drop in water level or evidence of moisture below the shower indicates a membrane failure that must be located and repaired before proceeding.

Professional tile installers in Ottawa typically extend this test beyond the minimum 24 hours, often running it for 48 to 72 hours, because the cost of remediation after tile installation is so much higher than fixing a membrane issue before tiling begins. A failed waterproofing system discovered after the tile is installed can cost \$10,000 to \$20,000 to properly remediate, versus a few hundred dollars to patch a membrane before tiling.

If you're planning a shower renovation that involves waterproofing work, connecting with experienced tile professionals through the Ottawa Construction Network directory can help ensure your project meets both code requirements and the higher standards needed for Ottawa's challenging climate conditions.

Q6

What is the difference between liquid-applied and sheet membrane waterproofing for Ottawa showers?

Liquid-applied membranes like RedGard and Hydroban are painted onto the substrate in multiple coats, while sheet membranes like Schluter Kerdi are adhered as pre-formed sheets using unmodified thinset.

Both create a fully waterproof barrier behind your tile, but they differ significantly in application method, cost, and suitability for different shower configurations.

Liquid-applied membranes excel in complex geometries — they seamlessly waterproof shower niches, built-in benches, curbs, and corners without the seaming required with sheet membranes. You simply brush or roll the liquid membrane into every corner, around every pipe penetration, and over every surface detail. This makes them ideal for custom Ottawa shower renovations with multiple niches, angled walls, or intricate tile layouts. The liquid cures to form a monolithic waterproof skin that moves with the substrate, which is particularly valuable in Ottawa where seasonal humidity swings cause wood framing to expand and contract behind shower walls.

Sheet membranes like Schluter Kerdi offer speed and consistency — an experienced installer can waterproof a standard shower enclosure much faster with sheet membrane than with multiple coats of liquid. The membrane comes in standard widths and is applied with unmodified thinset, creating predictable coverage and thickness. Kerdi integrates seamlessly with Schluter's complete system of drains, corners, and accessories, making it the preferred choice for many Ottawa tile professionals working on straightforward shower renovations.

Cost-wise, liquid membranes run \$3 to \$5 per square foot installed, while sheet membranes typically cost \$4 to \$7 per square foot installed. However, liquid membranes require more labour time for proper application — each coat must cure completely before the next coat, and most products require two to three coats for full waterproofing. Sheet membranes can be tiled over immediately once the thinset cures, potentially saving a day or two in your renovation timeline.

The critical factor in Ottawa is proper installation regardless of membrane type. Both systems will fail catastrophically if seams are not properly sealed, corners are not reinforced, or the membrane is punctured during tile installation. A failed shower waterproofing job in Ottawa can cost \$15,000 to \$25,000 to remediate once water reaches the framing and subfloor. When you're ready to move forward with professional shower waterproofing, you can browse experienced tile contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory who understand the critical importance of flawless waterproofing in our climate.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Tiling. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any tiling installation or renovation project. Information is current as of May 24, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawatiling.com for the latest answers.