The EIFS industry in Toronto is reeling over a move by the Ontario Association of Architects to ban the use of face seal systems by excluding them from coverage in its indemnity plan.

EIFS contractors will be forced to look at alternative systems as of July 1, when the exclusion goes into effect. Some industry pundits see it as a positive step because it aims to cut claims for shoddy workmanship against inexperienced and fly-by-night contractors that have come out of the woodwork during the construction boom.

“What we have failed as an industry to do is provide a labor force that is ready to meet this demand,” explains Nic Faienza, of Granolite Company Ltd., a major EIFS contractor that has never had a claim filed against it for faulty workmanship related to face seal units.

The OAA’s decision comes as “a bit of a shock” to Faienza and to other reputable contractors that have used face seal units. “We feel it is a good system if it is installed properly,” he says.

Unfortunately, not every applicator is doing a good job. Faulty flashing and inadequate caulking have resulted in claims resulting from moisture damage. Faienza says problems often stem from a poor evaluation by the EIFS contractor of the substrate and details before the face seal system is applied. To make matters worse, some general contractors that should catch mistakes rely on the EIFS sub because they aren’t familiar with proper installation methods themselves.

Face seal systems represent about 25 percent of Granolite’s business. For the contractor and other long-standing reputable contractors in Toronto, dual barrier (moisture drainage) systems represent the lion’s share of business. They are reliable systems, no one refutes that, but they have a down side: They cost 10 to 15 percent more than face seal systems. That extra cost has turned some clients away from EIFS. “What some owners end up doing is looking at alternative cladding systems, like brick,” Faienza explains.

Kevin Day, president of the EIFS Council of Canada, says he understands concerns over the OAA’s decision, but suggests that over the long term the move will benefit the EIFS industry and help it grow. Moisture sensitive substrates, he adds, are increasingly become commonplace as a second line of defense, and, in time, building codes and standards will likely require them for all cladding systems in Canada.

Currently, third-party inspections ensure that work is done right on major commercial projects, but often on smaller jobs the construction industry relies on the EIFS contractor to know what he is doing, just as they do with other subtrades. That’s where the trouble starts with face seal units.

On a related front, the EIFS Council of Canada continues to work on the creation of the industry’s first nationwide quality assurance program in North America. Once in place, expect to see fewer problems like this one cropping up, because everyone from architect to installer will be required to meet a common standard. To be successful, it will require the wholehearted support of building owners and specifiers.

While progress on the new program’s development hasn’t developed as quickly as hoped, organizers believe the launch of a pilot project could be within a few months, explains Kevin Day, president of the EIFS Council of Canada.

Plans call for the QAP to support more training for EIFS applicators and contractors. The timing couldn’t be better with rumblings in the air of more labor shortages this summer.

About the Author
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