What is the minimum time one must allow a stucco scratch coat to cure before applying the brown coat? —R.M.

When attempting to lend authority to my answers to questions such as this, I usually start by referring to the applicable ASTM standard whenever possible for a couple of reasons. First, because ASTM standards are as often as not cited in the prevailing code, and second, because I usually have the CD already loaded in my disk drive, so it’s just a mouse-click away to find out if there is an applicable standard. Sure enough, there is an ASTM standard—C926 “Standard Specification for Application of Portland Cement-Based Plaster,” (which is a seven-syllable term for stucco).

However, this standard is frustratingly vague when it comes to recommending cure times for the various stucco coats: “8.2 Sufficient time between coats shall be allowed to permit each coat to cure or develop enough rigidity to resist cracking or other physical damage when the next coat is applied. (See X1.4.2)”

Paragraph X1.4.2 uses several more paragraphs to flesh out the most salient statement buried within the text: “Cold or wet weather lengthens and hot or dry weather shortens the time period.” So there’s plenty of good information in C926, but no real concrete drying time guidelines.

Next I checked the building codes, BOCA’s National Building Code and SBCCI’s Standard Building Code (the caller was from the East Coast) for more specifics. Both codes basically refer the reader to ASTM C926. So before dragging out more codes, I called Darren Coats, technical advisor at the Western Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association’s Technical Services Information Bureau. Coats, as it turns out, has this section in ICBO’s Uniform Building Code bookmarked, suggesting to me that this is not an uncommon conversation.

The UBC is considerably more instructive on the issue. Section 2508 offers 16 paragraphs discussing the application of stucco and a table 25-F. This table shows minimum moist curing (drying) periods for three different varieties of cement plasters with nine footnotes. Each of the three stucco types require a minimum of 48 hours for both moist curing and between the scratch and brown coats; and seven days before applying the finish to the brown coat. There is also a note referring to section 2508.6, which explains that the re-coat period between scratch and brown coats may be reduced to 24 hours by using calcium aluminate cement in the mix. (Best to check with the supplier before trying this.)

The International Building Code offers language referring to ASTM C926, but includes an abbreviated table with the 48-hour moist cure/recoat times.

There have been several news reports of lawsuits resulting from improper storage or stacking or gypsum board panels. Are there any standards that actually address this? —E-mail

I hear regularly about lawsuits concerning the improper storage of gypsum panels. The complaints range from damages due to gypsum board that disintegrates, having apparently gotten wet before being installed (recently the same condition has fed the toxic mold frenzy), to children being crushed to death under stacks of wallboard that were improperly stored on edge and fell over on the victims.

The most recent language I’m aware of addressing the topic comes from the Gypsum Association’s GA 216-2000. I’d love to go into that language right now, but since I seem to be running out of room, I’ll just refer you to the article on page 75 of this magazine.

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