In these days of rampant mold litigation, are there special considerations that the spray-applied fire-resistant materials contractor should be aware of to avoid problems? —E-mail

AWCI’s technical committee on SFRM recently released a guide for the contractor, “AWCI Guide on Mold for Spray-Applied Fire-Resistant Materials Contractors,” that can be downloaded from the AWCI Web site www.awci.org/guideonmold.pdf. This document offers several points that need to be factored in by not just the SFRM applicators, since much of this is not news to them, but designers, general contractors and other trades as well.

SFRM by its very nature introduces a lot of water to the job site. Once applied, the SFRM must be given ample time and proper conditions for the water to dissipate before either testing or other work is done, otherwise that moisture lingers and could contribute to the conditions favorable for mold growth. The above mentioned document explains: “Proper ventilation and drying practices significantly reduce the effects that available moisture has on the SFRM surface as well as other building products and thereby reduce the probability for mold growth.”

The document advises the contractor of four points to keep in mind for the prevention of mold. First, make sure the product used is suitable for the application. There may be adverse drying conditions that require using a specific product. Second, make sure that there is sufficient fresh, dry air to remove the moisture added by the new material. According to the document: “Typically a minimum of four complete air exchanges per hour are recommended until the SFRM is fully cured. Proper ventilation is even more critical in high humidity, hot temperatures or rainy weather conditions. Under these conditions, dehumidifiers placed in the affected areas may be required.” Third, make sure that proper building sequencing is followed; in other words, don’t apply the fireproofing before the roof is on the building, lest it get soaked in the next rainstorm. Finally, make sure that any avenues that would allow excessive moisture in are identified and fixed both before and after the SRFM application.

One more important note about drying, whether it is for SFRM or any other building material: One of the products of combustion is moisture. The use of some heaters, such as propane or kerosene heaters that burn hydrocarbon-based fuels, can add as much as six gallons of moisture to the air for every gallon of fuel burned. So using such a heater and sealing the job site up tightly with plastic sheeting and duct tape (assuming these items can still be found now that the Department of Homeland Security has put them on the “must have” list) is a recipe for not only ensuring that the already available moisture doesn’t go anywhere, but adds enough moisture to ensure swamp-like conditions until dehumidifiers are brought in and running for some time.

When is the correct time to install interior drywall? After exterior wood sheathing, building paper and lath for stucco finish have been installed (prior to actual scratch coat application to allow building walls to be loaded to minimize cracking of the scratch coat), or is it more correct to install it after the three-coat stucco process is completed! —E-mail

As is occasionally my practice, I will post such a question on AWCI’s Netforum, located on the Internet at www.awci.org/netforum/awci/a, because I’m not always confident that my answer agrees with others closer to the specifics, and second because others will surely benefit from viewing the answer. In this case, Robert Ek from National Gypsum Company answered that the correct time to install the interior gypsum board is after the sheathing, building paper and lath, but before the scratch coat.

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