

# The Fire Marshall Rings Twice

Dear Gene:

Just got back from a visit with my banker. With interest rates what they are and not much relief in sight, the trip was almost as bad as a visit to the IRS office but you know all about that. So get out your crying towel and listen to my sad story about a recent job. As always, the parties to this story will remain anonymous to protect the guilty.

Most wall and ceiling contractors would call this job a plum, a real juicy plum. Six thousand feet of hospital corridors—20 thousand feet of steel stud partitions, an all gypsum wallboard ceiling and a general contractor who really wanted the job done right. The profit was there—not too much mind you, but enough to be a little more than just satisfied.

Right from the start everything went well. Coordination with the other trades was accomplished without too many hard feelings. Material prices were right on line and delivery was prompt. Installation was completed with only a few minor problems with some piping which were quickly solved. Due to a slowdown in commercial construction, they had no trouble manning the job with good

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*(Here is a fictional technical letter, based on some incidents that have actually occurred to wall and ceiling contractors. The "letter to the consultant" is intended to become a monthly feature and will be prepared by Gene Erwin, AWC Technical Director, and Dave Brackett, Eastern tech representative for The Gypsum Association.*

fast mechanics. So what could go wrong?

It wasn't until they were almost finished that the fan was turned on in the guise of the state fire marshal. Mr. X never had had a problem with him or his department before, just with building inspectors who thought that if it was wallboard and not plaster, there had to be something wrong.

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**"The fire inspector had finished his tour and reported to the General Contractor that he could not accept the supposed one hour rated walls."**

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Well, it was a Friday morning that they stood around waiting for the fire marshal to give his OK and he could take off for his two week Canadian fishing trip. He could see those big trout jumping on the end of his line. (Why that last one that hit must have run 18 pounds if it was an ounce!)

It was then the bubble burst. The fire inspector had finished his tour and reported to the GC that he could not accept the supposed one hour rated walls. I have to give the devil his due for they had overlooked the detail that said that when applied horizontally, all joints shall be staggered 24 inches on each side. They had just laid the board down and paid no attention to the fact that the four foot horizontal joints were directly opposite each other!

There went the ballgame or at least the fishing trip and probably the wife's new carpeting for the house, not to mention the addition to his early retirement fund. This "callback" took all the profit and more.

It would not be fair to tell you how we finally corrected this mistake because what one inspector might accept, another would turn down. I will give you an idea of the options and you can guess which one you might have used.

First of all we verified that the assembly they had erected—including the insulation put in each stud cavity for sound control—could not be awarded the one hour classification. This left us looking at tearing out one side and replacing the panels vertically, removing the lower sheet on one side and back blocking both sides at the joints or installing an additional layer of board on each side—complete with trim at the doors, etc. Veneer plaster on all walls was another possible solution.

The lesson we learned is obvious. Don't buy new fishing gear when you should be reviewing the details of fire resistive assemblies. A costly lesson to say the least but one they will not forget. Making lead men aware of details like this is important also. They can catch these mistakes early-on and that can save and save and save. Until next time, IROPMEL!

*Best regards*

Issi

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