Exterior insulation systems are gaining acceptance throughout North America.

These systems generally comprise a polystyrene board adhered to a substrate, usually gypsum sheathing, followed by glass fiber, specially formulated adhesives, and various finishes with degrees of hardness.

Lightweight, energy-effective, and durable, they can result in substantial savings in such things as reduced dead load, effecting savings in footings and structure, savings in heating and cooling equipment needs, and minimal maintenance.

While relatively new, the systems have established an excellent track record for performance. There are more than 15 manufacturers of exterior insulation systems today, with probably more coming. The industry will stabilize ultimately, but for the present there will be entry and exit of some systems.

Clear and Present Danger

As popularity of exterior insulation systems grows, it is inevitable that some people with a contractor’s license will eye the work and submit bids suggesting an alternate to that which is specified.

In some cases, the savings between the specified system and that proposed can be sufficiently attractive to persuade an otherwise diligent architect to accept the alternate. But what doesn’t show is the qualification of the contractor to install any given system. Some manufacturers will not sell their product to untrained applicators. By “untrained” is meant those who have not availed themselves of the instructional and hands-on classes which they can attend.

Many of the exterior insulation producers conduct classes regularly in different areas to properly communicate the technical know-how of their system to those who will be installing it. There may be others who are not quite so meticulous in their viewpoint of training. They may elect to sell their product to anyone who orders it. In many cases this may result in no problem. But in just as many, if not more, it can lead to possible catastrophe.

Determination of Responsibility

A contractor or applicator who proposes to install a specified system should be thoroughly acquainted with it in every detail. This includes even those “fine print” details which can be so easily overlooked. Bidding a job involves much more than desire for work.

By John J. Bucholtz, P.E.
It calls for know-how, no matter what the work, but especially important is know-how in a unique system.

The manufacturer has a responsibility to insure that a product or system is not abused. Selling materials to a willing buyer is only part of the equation. There is a real obligation to make certain the applicator can install the product or system to provide performance as outlined by the manufacturer.

New systems deserve the kind of treatment a new-born baby gets. TLC are the letters that might well serve as a basic guide to growing acceptance of a technique. It is incumbent upon the manufacturer to make certain his customer—the user—gets what the system is advertised as capable of providing. Anything less is an abdication of responsibility.