One concern facing wall and ceiling contractors on stucco projects is dealing with thickness complaints from the owner, general contractor or architect. Sometimes thickness issues arise long after a project has been completed.

Managing thickness issues depends on the type of material and the substrate to which the material is applied. For example, when applying a fibrous or cementitious fireproofing material, the purpose of spraying to a specified thickness relates to obtaining fire ratings. The applicator measures the thickness as the material is being applied. If an area is thin, it can be resprayed since the purpose of fireproofing is fire protection and cosmetics are not an issue.

Traditional and synthetic stucco applications are somewhat different. With these systems, cosmetics are a primary issue and the ability to re-spray or reapply the material to adjust thickness is more difficult. Following these steps when faced with a thickness question may assist you in resolving the issue:

1. Before application, thickness questions may come up while examining the substrate. These questions may arise as a result of wood studs that bow slightly or as a result of alignment, plumbing and squaring imperfections in the unit masonry or concrete substrate. You should review the specifications carefully and pay particular attention to all codes incorporated into the specifications which discuss the tolerances for stucco thickness.

2. Call to the attention of the general contractor, prior to the application of materials, the imperfections in the substrate.

3. Get the complaining party, either the owner, general contractor or architect, to state specifically the location and magnitude of the thickness complaint.

4. Check areas yourself to best determine whether there are thin or thick areas, and if there are, determine why. If the substrate was unacceptable, remind the complaining party of your communication with the contractor where you provided notice of the substrate condition and advised him that you would not be responsible for technical thickness deficiencies required in order to obtain a cosmetically planer surface.

5. If you determine that there is sufficient thickness, obtain a copy of the elevation drawings of the building and mark on the elevations a grid. Measure the thickness at each cross mark and record the thickness. You can do this by taking small core samples. Document everything you do with notes and photographs. Use a data back camera that records the date on the picture. If the complaint warrants it, consider videotaping the procedure.

6. Show your results to the complaining party and meet to resolve the issues.

Following these steps will not insulate you from having the thickness questions raised at a later date, but they will provide you with a defense arsenal if the issues come up.

About the Authors

Stephen A. Hilger, Esq. practices law with the firm of Rhoades, McKee, Boar, Goodrich and Titta in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His experience is in litigation, primarily construction litigation with a heavy emphasis in the drywall and stucco industry. He has represented and continues to represent several AWCI members.

Harry Rourke has been in the industry since 1947. A member of ASTM C-11 and a former director of the Florida Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association, he founded Harry E. Rourke and Associates, a Miami consulting firm, in 1983.