Q: I've been in the drywall business for 10 years, and I see the same problem on job after job. Contract documents use terms like "compliance with industry standards" and "workmanlike finish," but they don't include anything specific to describe how the finished job should look. How can I comply with these vague requirements? How do I get the architect to use specific language we both understand to describe what is wanted or expected so that I'm sure we're both "on the same page"?

A: For many years, contract documents have included nonspecific terms to describe how gypsum board walls and ceilings should look prior to final decoration (painting, wallcovering). And, for just as many years, wall and ceiling contractors have tried to fulfill their obligations by providing the finish conditions envisioned but not truly described.

The "Recommended Specification on Levels of Gypsum Board Finish" was developed to resolve this problem.

The spec defines finish terminology and describes six separate levels of finish, including when each level is most appropriate.

The document was designed to be incorporated into the appropriate sections of project documents and should help ensure that the architect, general contractor and building owner can better anticipate the final appearance of the decorated wall and ceiling system.

The document addresses factors to be considered in determining the level of finish of the gypsum board surface. Once these factors have been taken into consideration, and using the terms defined in the document, the specifier is equipped to specify a level of finish, using language that responsible contractors can understand and produce the desired results.

The recommended specification was developed jointly by The Association of the Wall & Ceiling Industry -International (AWCI), the Ceilings & Interior Systems Construction Association (CISCA), the Gypsum Association (GA) and the Painting and Decorating Contractors of America (PDCA).

You can avoid a lot of headaches by sharing a copy of the document with the architect. It's probably a good idea to purchase a quantity of the documents so that you'll have them on hand to give to the architect the next time you see those dreaded words! (Copies of the spec are available from AWCI.)