A Modest Proposal

RESOLVING THE ISSUES SURROUNDING EIFS FAILURES

By Dick Hopkins

Can all the issues surrounding EIFS failures be resolved? If so, how do we resolve them? To answer to the first question—yes, the issues can be solved with time and concentrated industry effort. The answer to the second question is more difficult. Perhaps the following six point program is a start to finding those answers:

1. AWCI and EIMA would assume the task of developing and implementing a program to provide independent inspections. As an incentive to the owner to employ an independent inspector, perhaps the EIFS manufacturers would consider offering an extended materials warranty to the owner. The applicator would offer an extended workmanship warranty. Another idea is to provide some sort of bond for material performance and workmanship instead of a warranty. On the other side of the coin if the owner chooses not to employ an independent inspector, the EIFS manufacturers would not offer a warranty or offer a very short term materials warranty. The applicator would offer the same for their workmanship. In my opinion in no instance should an EIFS manufacturer undertake to warrant workmanship. I think to inspire the owner to hire an inspector there needs to be an incentive of some kind. The program and incentive should be an industry standard.

2. EIMA should take the lead and develop an industry standard applicator qualification, training and certification program. The program should be enforceable. EIFS distributors must be part of the program and be accountable. Most of the EIF manufacturers already have some form of program in place. Unfortunately, although the programs are a good idea and a step in the right direction, they are given a lot of lip service and very little enforcement. Making the program an industry standard will go a long way to making it work and giving the program credibility.

An embryo of the training part of the program already exists in the form of the AWCI/EIMA Pre-Apprenticeship program. This program could easily be expanded to a comprehensive training course.

Other trades or industries are or have implemented these programs. Other trades or industries are or have implemented these programs. According to an article in the December 1992 New England Edition of the Journal of Light Construction, DuPont has implemented a certification program for installers of their Corian counter top surfacing materials. Their certification standard does not forbid suppliers to sell to non-certified installers. However, the product does not carry DuPont’s ten year warranty unless it is installed by an “approved fabricator” or “certified distributor/fabricator.” The article goes on to say that suppliers that want the protection of the DuPont warranty will have to sell only to approved or certified fabricators. As you can see they have included their distributors in the loop. The one requirement to become a certified installer that stands alone from the requirements to follow DuPont fabrication techniques, maintain a properly equipped shop and attend annual fabrication courses, was “demonstrate an ongoing commitment to quality.” In other words keep your quality up or you will lose your certification.

Other examples come from the Business Forum Column of the same issue of the Journal of Light Construction. Two other programs are described for certification of remodelers by NAHB Remodelers Council and NARI. Both programs require submittals of applications including references, a minimum number of year’s experience, stringent review of qualifications, both initial and continuing educational requirements, financial commitments through application and educational fees, written exams and periodic recertification.

The bottom line is an industry standard applicator certification program that is enforced will go a long way to prevent failures, neutralize the “nay sayers” and reinforce the perception that the EIFS industry is a professional group working together to provide high quality installations of EIFS.

3. With regard to education of the architects and general contractors, AWCI in conjunction with EIMA should develop and direct educational resources specifically to the architectural and general contractor community. There is a tremendous pool of technical talent and knowledge within the AWCI and EIMA organizations. AWCI and EIMA need to take this knowledge to the architectural and general contractor community in the form of technical training, not sales presentations. Of course there is a beneficial side effect of promoting the wall and ceiling industry and EIFS.
4. EIMA has an excellent training program for building officials. This program was presented successfully in Ohio a year or so ago. The program was so well accepted that attendees received CEU credit. Because of the attacks by competitive interests, EIMA has gained a tremendous amount of experience, knowledge and credibility in the building code arena. They have the contacts and the program. EIMA should take advantage of this ability and make a concentrated effort to present their training program to as many building officials as possible.

5. There is a serious need for consensus performance and application standards for EIFS. The arena in which these standards should and are being developed is ASTM. A tremendous amount of work is complete with regard to the development of standard practices for the application of PB and PM systems. However, little work is being accomplished in the development of consensus performance standards for EIFS. Members of the EIFS industry, manufacturers, industry suppliers, distributors and contractors alike, absolutely must become more active and assume leadership roles in the standards development process at ASTM, in particular EIFS performance standard work. Individual membership only costs $50, you can pick the committees on which you wish to be active, and you don’t have to attend every meeting to participate. Voting on standards is done by letter ballot, and as a member you will have a voice.

6. EIFS manufacturers must evaluate their position with regard to how and to whom they are selling their products and how much control they are willing to exercise over their distributors. Part of this process may come with an industry standard applicator certification program. The bottom line is that EIFS manufacturers must take measures to ensure proper presentation of their products to the design community and installation by the best qualified applicators available who demonstrate a consistent commitment to quality.

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It is not the intent of these ideas or any program to restrict competition. It is the sole intent of these ideas to improve the quality of EIFS installations. I believe if the industry will take these ideas, give them serious thought, expand on them and make a serious effort to implement them, we will be on our way to eliminating the majority of failures and becoming the premier wall system of choice.

About the Author:
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Mr. Hopkins is active on AWCI and ASTM, currently serving in several committees of both organizations.