

CERTIFICATION AS CLOUT

***AWCI Launches Its EIF Smart
Program for Contractor Distinction***

With its introduction of the new EIF*Smart* program, which started in July 2002, the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries—International is extending its EIFS certification program for individuals into one for the company active in implementing this advanced training for its employees. The program is designed not only to recognize contractors who have committed themselves to quality training for their employ-

By Thomas G. Dolan

The logo features a stylized blue and grey icon of a wall and ceiling corner on the left. To its right, the word "EIFSMART" is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below "EIFSMART", the word "Contractor" is written in a smaller, grey, sans-serif font, followed by a thick blue horizontal bar.

ees, but also to give them a decisive economic and competitive edge.

The EIF *Smart* program is a simple and natural outgrowth of the individual certification program, but it also represents a quantum leap. As explains Mark Nabity, president/CEO of Grayhawk,

LLC, Lexington, Ky., and also chairman of AWCI's Curriculum and Examination Committee, "Contractors sponsoring their employees to go through the EIFS certification program are doing well. EIF *Smart* is their payback."

Nabity says the new program is designed

to raise the certification process to a level where it can be used as a business tool. "It's a way to differentiate not just individuals, but also contracting companies."

How Does It Make a Difference?

"First of all," responds Nabity, "the contractor can go to the owner or general contractor and have a selling point for why they should deal with his company. It shows he has both higher quality standards and tighter specifications." The intent also, Nabity continues, is to persuade architects to include these new standards in their specifications. The distinction comes because the contractor can prove he runs a quality company because the company is listed on AWCI's National Registry, on the

Committee members who set policy for the EIF <i>Smart</i> Contractor:	
Mark Nabity	Carl Fernald
Mike Boyd	Steve Klamke
Brent Allen	Pete Lovell
Kevin Day	Dan Parmele
Bo Haering	Jerry Wolff
Frank Guidera	

AWCI Web site, and he can show it to owners, architects and other trade parties.

"As a long-term strategy, the EIF *Smart* program will build confidence with customers and also provide a competitive edge because the EIF *Smart* contractor will be offering something others do not," Nabity maintains. One such benefit will likely be enhanced manufacturer warranties, for certainly EIFS manufacturers



**The contractor
now has
another selling
point for the
owner or GC.**

those responsible for windows, flashings and other details, the negative attitudes that have attached themselves to EIFS have pulled the industry down. And, despite the many efforts the industry has made to improve the situation, this negativity, in terms of public perception, has not gone away.

“I think we have a wonderful product in EIFS,” Nabity says. “But there are all these outside influences who don’t understand the product, building inspectors, code bodies, insurance companies and various homebuilder organizations. All these parties are impinging on what we do. General contractors and

will want to do everything they can to promote the quality of their products.

Another important party to be influenced is the insurance company, Nabity explains. The bad press accorded to EIFS makes it a liability, and, with insurance rates currently high across the board, a program that insures both product quality and sound applications can certainly help bring down rates.

Is This Program Really Necessary?

Nabity answers that two sets of pressures led to the creation of EIF *Smart*. The first came from external factors, and the second from within AWCI itself.

In terms of the former, Nabity points to the well-known black eye EIFS has received as a result of residential misapplications starting in Wilmington, N.C., a few years back. Although these well-publicized mistakes were made by a relatively few contractors—many of them not even EIFS contractors but rather



Current committee members guiding the EIFS^{smart} distinction:
Left to right, standing: Carl Fernald, Frank Guidera, George Haering,
Kevin Day; seated: Mark Nabity, Pete Lovell, Jerry Wolff.
Not shown: Mike Boyd, Brent Allen, Steve Klamke, Dan Parmele

architects like EIFS, but they're not going to be able to use it if their insurance companies and inspectors tell them not to. We have to control our own destiny, or our industry is in jeopardy."

What these parties don't understand,

Nabity continues, is that the problem is not in the EIFS material or the system itself, but how it interfaces with other construction material. The typical homebuilder is not doing as good a job as he should in this type of coordination. The window, or, or sealant joint might

not be properly installed, flashing may be nonexistent, or the installation may not have been set up so that if a window has to drain, it does so outside the wall and not within.

Have these problems developed because newer, modern materials are less amenable to fitting together than the older materials? No, Nabity replies. The problem is that "builders of an earlier era were hands-on craftsmen. Now they are more brokers who understand the business side, but not the building side." These problems have developed more in the residential area since commercial projects have more checks, such as documents that define the job, written specifications, inspectors on the job sites, submittals on the front end and material approvals. The residential builder is not subject to these controls.

The only way to resolve this situation, says Nabity, is to "raise the bar, to force those contractors who have not gone through the time and expense to train

and certify their work force to do so—or they will be clearly not on the same playing field as those who do quality work.”

There were also pressures within AWCI, which led to the development of the new program. Naby explains that in 1998, in the wake of the Wilmington scandal, AWCI initiated its individual certification program. However, out of some 35,000 to 40,000 applicators, or mechanics, there are only about 700 to 750 people with certificates, and those include inspectors and nonmechanic industry personnel.

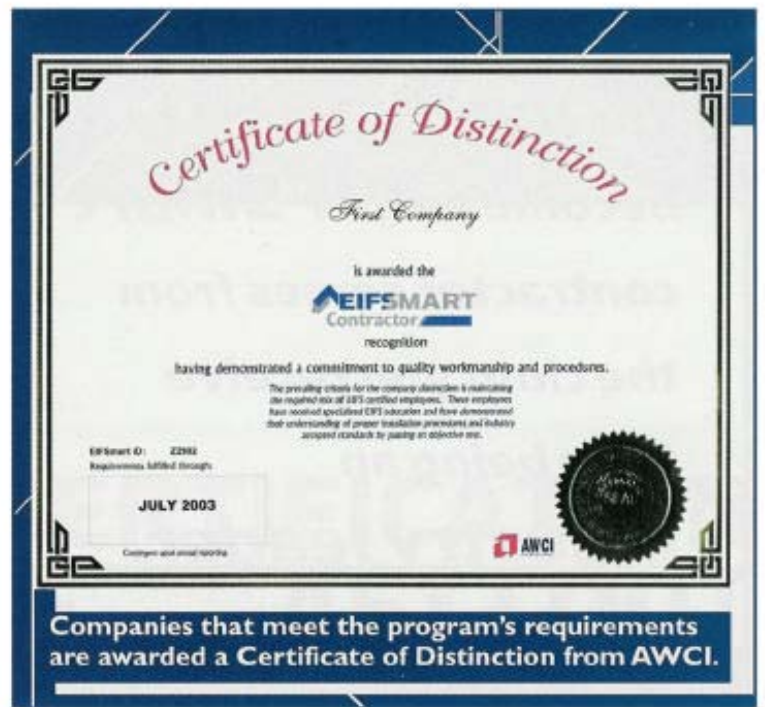
So, if so few people, relatively, have achieved the individual certificates, how

realistic is it to expect companies to accelerate putting their employees through the individual certification process to achieve contracting-company distinction status?

Naby responds that this was exactly the issue that AWCI dealt with, and his answer is, “The responsible

contractors I talked to basically said they were already doing the right thing, they

were not part of the EIFS problem, so why should they go to the time and



The motivation to become an EIF Smart contractor comes from the clout you receive from being an industry leader.

expense to get their employees certified? We realized we had to give them a motivation.” The motivation, he continues, was the clout that the contractors would have by being the leaders in raising the bars and achieving the necessary standards.

What Are the Requirements?

Basically, the requirements to become an EIF *Smart* contracting company have to do with the percentage of the company’s employees who receive the individual certifications. There is a scheduled “ramp up” on the basis that expecting contractors to achieve the required numbers instantaneously would be both unfair and unrealistic. On the other hand, waiting several years for contractors to gradually build up would also postpone the anticipated benefits for several years. So the intent is to make the program doable.

The scheduled ramp-up is as follows:

- July 2002: To become an EIF *Smart*

company’s EIFS employees must be certified. Also starting in 2004, the contracting company must have an EIFS-certified foreman on each EIFS job site.

- 8 July 2005: 40 percent of the company’s EIFS employees must have one of the three categories (mechanic, inspector or industry professional) of EIFS certification.

The program will be relatively easy to administer in that AWCI will depend on contractor reports of number of employees certified. Each location of any particular company will be subject to random checks to make sure the reported certifications are accurate.

contracting company) the initial requirement calls for two nationally certified employees, one from management and one from the field, per company, by July 2002.

- July 2003: 10 percent of the company’s EIFS employees must be certified.

- July 2004: 20 percent of the com-

There will be only a nominal fee for applying for the program, which will be waived the first year. The main contractor expense will be the cost of the individual employee certification.

The certifications take place through two-day seminars, offered about three times a year. The cost ranges from \$250 to \$475, depending upon whether the applicant is a member or nonmember of AWCI, and also depending on the classification, whether professional, mechanic, or inspector.

Since one complaint has been about the time lost to employees going to the seminar, AWCI has devised a video program with five copies of the workbook, for



Instructor-led classes held throughout the country can help your company become EIFSmart.

\$575. In using this self-instruction course, the employer can choose when to teach his employees, taking advantage of down-time or workdays lost due to inclement weather.

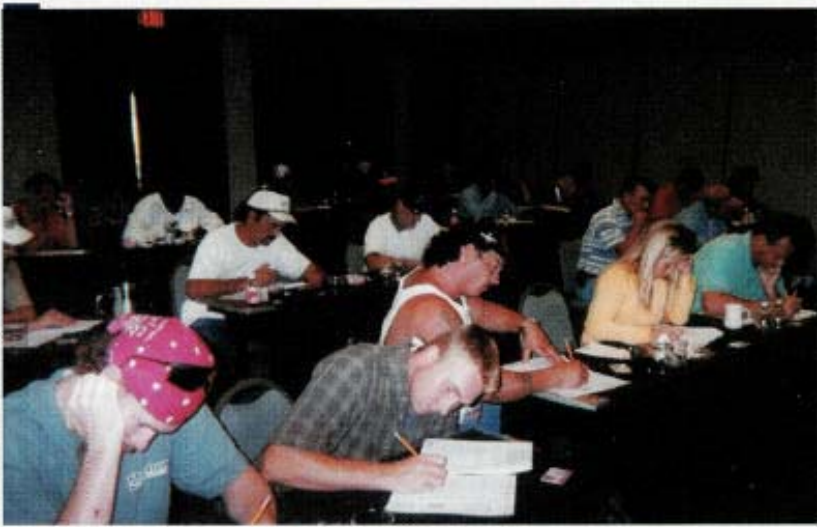
Nabity says that, though AWCI would be pleased if the program attracted new

members to AWCI, this is only a secondary consideration. The main one is to raise the standards within the industry. For this reason, a contractor does not have to be a member of AWCI to partake.

How Does AWCI Plan to Make the Program Work?

Recognizing the level of training received through apprentice programs, Nabity says the association is working very closely with the building trade unions, trying to get them to have their apprentices certified.

“We’re continually working with the insurance industry to educate them about what we are doing,” Nabity says. “And we’re working with the American Institute



Attendees must pass an examination before they receive their certificate in one of three categories.



The courses can be used to teach proper EIFS application to mechanics, inspectors and industry professionals.

of Architects to have the certifications included in architects' specifications." AWCI is also working closely with the EIFS Industry Members Association. In addition, AWCI is sending a mailing campaign to contractors, both members and nonmembers of the association, as well as to code officials, inspectors,

industry professionals and those in related industries.

"The industry has needed a way to distinguish contracting companies that are committed to quality EIFS installations," Nabity says. "We believe EIFS mart is a way of identifying those com-

panies to owners, architects and other trade factors through extensive and proper training of their work force and through employee certification. Likewise, having this title of distinction is a reward for the deserving companies." 