Letters

Vapor-Barrier Paints Rated

To the Editor:

Your December issue is terrific. Both the selection of topics and the information provided are excellent. The asbestos piece ["A Contractor's Guide to Asbestos"] should be required reading for every contractor. Congratulations.

I'd like to respond to an answer given by Henry Spies to a question about vapor "barrier" paints. An article from the April '84 *New Shelter* deals with just this question. The article refers to a more complete technical report available from their product-testing department.

New Shelter claims to have surveyed about 90 percent of the paints on the market at the time to come up with six brands that met their qualifications as vapor "barriers." Four brands are primer-sealers [Moore's Alkyd Primer Sealer, Sears Best Oil Base Primer 5881, Insul-Aid, and B-I-N Primer Sealer]; two are alkyd top coats [Thermo-Paint, Satin Impervo Low Lustre Enamel].

Mr. Spies recommended that two coats of alkyd enamel or Glidden Insul-Aid might be used as a vapor retarder. The paints listed in the *New Shelter* report included only paints that provided a "certifiable perm rating...of 1 or less than 1 under normal *one-coat* conditions."

A concern I have (which Mr. Spies may share) about the *New Shelter* report is that it is apparently based on manufacturers' *specifications* for their products, not on independent laboratory testing done by the magazine.

Hope this sheds a little light on the issue. We're all learning that energy-efficient construction is more complex than we ever imagined.

Understanding the interaction between energy conservation, ventilation, moisture, durability, and health requires information exchange among a number of disciplines. I think that your magazine is doing us all a great service in raising these questions.

Al Wasco
Education Coordinator
Housing Resource Center
Cleveland, Ohio

P.S. By the way, I'd like to second the motion raised by another letter writer: please consider a change in format to a smaller size—we have to fold each issue to fit it into our standard magazine files.

Don't Blame the Architect

To the Editor:

Blaming the architect because the system doesn't work [Letter to the Editor: "Architects Should Learn Carpentry," December 1986] is not going to correct the problem. If the traditional practices don't appeal to you, choose an alternative method (and there are many) or go back to being a teacher.

My organization has been offering "design build" and "cost plus a fixed fee" services for the past 11 years with great success. This is a team approach, allowing structured input from the owner, builder, subcontractor, or craftsperson, as well as the architect. Cost-plus compensation is much fairer to both the owner and contractor and still gives the owner accurate indications of the cost of the project. Trust, constant communication, and hard work are very important ingredients, as well as maintaining the team attitude with all participants throughout the project.

Stephen Lasar, AIA
New Milford, Conn.

Hazardous to Your Health

To the Editor:

I'm interested in learning about the adverse health consequences of common, everyday carpentry, e.g., breathing plywood dust, redwood dust, chemically-treated-lumber dust, handling galvanized nails, listening to the noise of nail guns, hammers, power saws, etc. Does the Environmental Protection Agency publish articles on these questions? Can you please direct me to sources of this type of information?

Torsten Heycke
Fallen Leaf, Calif.

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, 101 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20001, publishes a number of pamphlets and fact sheets on job-site hazards. Contact them for a list of materials.

Other sources you might try:

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 4676 Columbia Pkwy., Cincinnati, OH 45226. Call their publications department at 513/841-4287, or technical assistance at 513/533-8328.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Publications, U.S. Dept. of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave., NW, Room S-4520, Washington, DC 20210, 202/523-9655.

The Environmental Protection Agency publishes mostly scientific literature and is more concerned with environmental issues, although they have published material on treated-wood exposure. Their phone number for publications is 513/569-7562, but first you'll need to look up an EPA bibliography in your local library.

Of course, dealing extensively with federal agencies can also be hazardous to your health. —Ed.

Case Closed

To the Editor:

I have just read with interest the three studies in "Case in Point" in the November '86 issue.

David Scott's explanation of how the Canadian researchers sleuthed and found these problems underscores the importance in cold climates of quality workmanship in installing a vapor retarder and in blocking all air-exfiltration passageways. But I am surprised that their conclusions did not include the following:

1. Case one: The picture illustrates a pretty ghastly ventilation system. Were it done properly, the excess moisture may have caused less damage.

2. Case two: Bathtubs should not be installed against outside walls in cold climates.

3. Case three: The apparently standard use of 2x4 studding 16 inches o.c. with paper-clad R-12 batts and single-ply exterior cladding in cold climates is poor practice. Were those houses insulated to the better standards reasonably common today—R-19 batts in 2x6 walls and rigid insulated foam sheathing on the exterior—I doubt that they would have found the damage to the plywood siding and the framing that they found.

How about rot behind the horizontal battens? They probably were not properly Z-flashed or even caulked.

Henri de Marne
Waitsfield, Vt.

Plumbing Politics

To the Editor:

A few years ago there was an Environmental Impact Report on plastic plumbing pipes by Stanford Research Institute and the California Housing & Community Development Commission. Can you get a copy of the results and sum it up in a future issue?

I just read about Cue-Tel's automatic faucets ["Auto-Faucets & Euro-Cabinets," November 1986] that turn on when an object is placed underneath it. They remind me of the electric-eye urinals I saw in 1972 in restrooms on the Ohio turnpike. I had a vision of a teenager rushing to school, wadding up a towel and scoring a two-point shot—in the sink!

Aaah, yes—technology. Better increase my liability insurance coverage.

D. Toivainen
Pine, Az.

The Environmental Impact Report on plastic plumbing has been in preparation since 1979, and with any luck it will be available by next fall, according to officials at the California Department of Housing & Community Development.

The chief hang-up now is the issue of water safety. Versar, Inc., of Springfield, Va., was hired by California to test for water safety, but their test methods and preliminary results were contested by the plumbing industry, and their research contract terminated.

Metal-plumbing manufacturers still allege that plastic is poison, Versar is suing California for $10 million for breach of contract, California is looking for another lab, and we still don't know whether drinking water from PB or CPVC piping is safe.

Question: Can you leave dirty dishes in the sink with an electric-eye faucet?—Ed.

We welcome letters, but they must be signed and include the writer's address. *New England Builder* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail letters to *NEB*, P.O. Box 5059, Burlington, VT 05402.