Letters

Euro-Radiators Compete

To the Editor:

Thank you for mentioning ThermoPanel radiators in your recent article on European radiators [Focus on Energy, 10/87].

There were some remarks which I have to take exception to, however. First, you mentioned several times in the article that panel radiators are very expensive. If you consider the Btu output per square foot of ThermoPanel radiators and compare this to U.S. convectors or radiators, we are more than competitive in pricing.

Also, we have found that our panel-type radiators have been more than acceptable to housing authorities in the U.S., since we have sold nearly 7,500 radiators to this market in the past year.

Macon Control Corporation is not merely a distributor. We buy component parts from the Swedish manufacturer, assemble from our warehouse stock in Durand, and can ship within 48 hours.

Jerry Swihart
Macon Control Corp.
Durand, Mich.

The Cheapest Air Barrier is None

To the Editor:

This letter is in response to Alex Wilson's fine article about air barriers for the construction industry [Focus on Energy, 8/87]. Mr. Wilson lists the four "most important properties" in his introduction and adds "cost" to this list in his analysis.

Let us review Mr. Wilson's five specifications if we do not install an air infiltration barrier.

Cost: If not present, a moot question. (This item in Mr. Wilson's article referred to product comparison. Apparently Mr. Wilson assumed the labor expense of installation as mandatory. Staying with Mr. Wilson's premise, we won't discuss installation problems or savings from no labor).

Durability: If not present, a moot question.

Permeability: If not present, a moot question.

Air porosity: "The purpose of an air barrier was to save energy by reducing infiltration..." This is the justification for using all air barriers. When using standard building practices as in today's construction industry—what infiltration? Using Mr. Maloney's illustration on page 39 of the same issue, let's move inward from the air barrier. The first layer is plywood sheathing blocked on all edges and nailed 6 inches on center. (A.P.A. Product Guide). Does the plywood allow infiltration? I think not. Do the edges of the plywood fastened to the 2x6 wall allow infiltration? I think not. What if they did? Where would the infiltration go! The wall cavities are filled with insulation. The wall is sealed with a layer of poly (interestingly Mr. Maloney's poly only stops vapors).

Water resistance: A "potentially important property . . . seems reasonable to [Mr. Wilson]" and it seems reasonable to me, but is it relevant?

The real problem with today's airtight construction theory is not the walls but the penetrations in the walls. Whether they be windows or electrical boxes or whatever. Mr. Nelson on page 42 of the same issue discusses the importance of this detail.

Tyvek is an example of technology's marvelous accomplishments. The material can perform wonderous feats, but is it necessary to the construction industry? Instead of covering our heads with a blanket, could not our time, energy, and thinking be better spent increasing quality, not costs?

Stuart West
Westmoreland, N.H.

Greetings from the Coast

To the Editor:

Congratulations on the magazine. Of the twenty or so design periodicals I find myself reading each month, *NEB* is among the most worthwhile. Thank you, and keep it up.

William Fisher
William Fisher Architecture
Capitola, Calif.

Problems Not a Coincidence

To the Editor:

I have read and re-read Gordon Tully's article on "Energy- Detail Dilemmas" in the August 1987 issue of *New England Builder.* It is excellent. I enjoyed it immensely and gave copies to all of my staff. There is really more truth than humor in the article.

Since I have been investigating building performance and construction problems for many years, I have seen all the problems and solutions you discussed. Add to this the self-protective and conflicting instructions from manufacturers, and I'm not sure our industry has even invented the airplane yet.

There are common problems with moisture and the floor joist areas; I see them all the time:

1) The first spring or two after construction you see water running out of the wall between courses of lap siding.

2) Distortion of the siding due to excessive shrinking and swelling of the framing member due to extreme changes in moisture content.

3) The one you are looking for rotting of the floor joists, plates, etc.

All of these problems have occurred in all parts of the country, not just the cold northern areas. There is one common thread with these three problems, they only occur with buildings constructed after 1975. I believe this is more than a coincidence.

Thanks again for an excellent article.

Ted A. Wetterman
Product Assurance Mgr.
Masonite Corp.
Laurel, Miss.

Grout Gripes

To the Editor:

I have just finished reading the November issue. Concerning tile, I have used latex additive in grout (full strength). The problem I have is removing the grout from the tile face. If I try to wipe the face too soon, the joint is too wet and I remove the grout from the joint. Any solutions!"

Reader
Hordville, Neb.

Steve Thompson replies:

You are like many other tilesetters who have begun to include latex or acrylic additives to grout mixtures. These products can be a big help, but they can cause problems for the mechanic in the field. The retarder additives in the admix slow down the firming of the grout in the joints because of the rather thick cross section. On the face of the tiles, where the excess grout material is relatively thin, the retarders are less effective and so the grout here hardens quickly.

To solve your cleaning problems, there are two tools you can use to save time and trouble. The first is called "Groutmaster" and is available at most tile retailers or distributors. The Groutmaster is a rubber trowel used to spread grout and compact it into the joints (there are two types— one rather stiff for floor grouting and one cushioncd by a layer of flexible foam that is designed for walls).

With the joints fully packed, hold the face of the trowel at about a 90-degree angle to the face of the tiles and "squeegee" the excess grout off of the tiles. To prevent the trowel from digging into the joints, hold the edge of the Groutmaster diagonally to the joints. This should remove most of the grout from the surface.

At this point, depending on the temperature, you may be able to leave the job alone for up to an hour unless the edges of the tiles are rounded over (cushioned edge tiles). If this is the case, use a striking tool that leaves a slightly concave surface between the edges of neighboring tiles. The excess will pile up at the perimeter of the tiles and can be removed easily once the grout in the joints has firmed up.

A little experimentation will be needed to determine when the joint grout is firm. When it is, the second stage of cleaning can begin. If you had to strike the joints, remove the piled-up excess with a whisk broom.

The second step will normally require only a sponge to loosen the residue on the surface. If the residue is too hard for the sponge, you will need a second tool and this is a "Scotchbrite" pad found in most supermarkets or cleaning supply stores. It is also available to the tile trade us "Doodlebug" with the pad attached to a handle. (Laticrete epoxy grout kits include a Scotchbrite pad.) Moisten the pad with clean water and rub over the surface of the tiles until the hardened stuff is removed and then finish the job with a sponge to remove the excess water on the surface.

Keep in mind that with latex or acrylic grouts, a minimum of water should be used to keep from diluting the grout mix. When using the newer epoxy grouts, the above instructions also apply. By the way, don't feel like you are alone — this is a fairly widespead problem.

Better Fiberglass Shingle Needed

To the Editor:

In regards to "Fiberglass Shingles," *[NEB* 10/87, page 15], yes, I have had my share of problems with shingles. They blew off a beach front house at the shore twice. We also have had a lot of problems with granules coming off of them.

When roofing and siding a house we like to step flash any roof that runs into a wall. We have to roof first and when it is time to put the siding on, any foot traffic will destroy the surface of the fiberglass shingles.

The manufacturers must have put more adhesive on the shingles judging by the last problem we had. Out of 15 squares of shingles delivered to our last addition, 10 squares were solid packs of asphalt glass bricks that had to be sent back.

The manufacturers are very good about replacing the shingles, but materials only. Let us hope that research continues and we find a better shingle at a reasonable price.

David Dougherty
J. Dougherty & Son
Glassboro, N.J.

Clever Fan Switch

To the Editor:

As an addendum to Henri de Marne's November 1987 article on bathroom venting: A clever, little-known switch does everything he wants and more than the "crank timer" he recommends. It's the Airminder time-delay switch. It is a single toggle switch that controls two separate 120 vac circuits-one to the fan and one to the light. When the switch is turned on both come on immediately; when the switch is turned off the light goes off immediately and fan continues to run for an additional 4 to 15 minutes depending on the amount of time the switch was turned on. It is rated at

10 amp maximum. It is a little pricey at about $30 wholesale, but I've not seen anything else like it. It would be a very nice control for non-heat recovery ventilation systems, also. It's sold by Penn Ventilator, Red Lion and Gantry Roads, Philadelphia, PA 19115; 215/464-8900.

Keep up the great work on your publication.

Dave Brook
Oregon State University
Extension Service
Portland, Ore.

No to Roofing Felt

To the Editor:

In reading the October 1987 issue of *New England Builder*, I question your advice in the "On the House" column pertaining to the use of 15# felt under roof shingles. Other points to consider before choosing to install felt are the difficulty workmen have reaching the peak to snap vertical chalk lines for starter or soldier courses and the bubbling that can occur overnight making it nearly impossible to install the shingles smoothly without cutting out these bubbles or waiting until 11:00 a.m. for the sun to settle the felt. Because of the danger to my men, I do not recommend the use of felt to my clients unless the local inspector insists upon its use.

Robert G. Wiedenmann, Jr.
Building Contractor
Wallingford, Conn.

Don't Omit Ventilation

To the Editor:

In regard to the letter to the editor "No Need for Ice-Dams," by Bruce Austin, Peltham, Mass [*NEB* 11/87], I take issue with his statement that if the attic space is superinsulated, then ventilation is not advisable as not enough heat escapes through the ceiling assembly to make the ventilation work.

We must remember that the two prime reasons to ventilate an attic space are:

1. To reduce the heat load in the summer, thereby reducing cooling costs. (Overheating will also cause curling of the shingles.)
2. To reduce any moisture buildup in the winter.

I have been using high/low vent systems at a ratio of one square foot per 300 square feet of attic space with great satisfaction.

Frank Dunphy
Dunphy Construction Co.
Clerk of Builder's License
Examiner Board
Quincy, Mass.

Keep 'em coming..... 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.