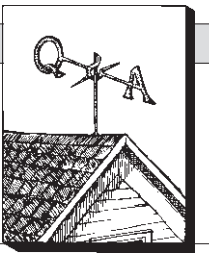
Common Callbacks



by Henry Spies

Q. *What are the most common callbacks in residential building? I would like this information to help me in preparing a better customer service program.*

A. I do not know of any official statistics to back me up, but from my own experience I have found four basic problem areas:

The first problem is wood shrinkage from drying lumber. This causes nail pops, drywall cracks, binding doors, and open trim joints.

The second problem category is from backfill and grading settlement. This can create drainage problems, driveway and patio cracks, and lawn dips over utility trenches.

The third problem area is from moisture condensation during the first winter following new construction. There is a surprising amount of water coming out of a new building; there can be as much as a ton of moisture evaporating out of concrete foundations and slabs, other masonry, and lumber during the first heating season.

The last problem is the poor distribution of heating and cooling. This causes client discomfort more than anything else.

Probably the best customer service in my experience is to inform the buyer of the possible problems he or she will experience. If you can avoid surprises, you are way ahead. I pass out a copy of a paper called "What is Happening to My House" whenever I can. It gives a good description of problems such as nail pops and truss uplift for homeowners. For a free copy, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Common Callbacks, c/o *JLC*, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.

Gross Green Growth

Q. *I am working on an old house with green mold growing on the painted clapboards. The clapboards are a combination of spruce and cedar and they have been primed and painted with an oil-based paint. The mold seems to be growing over every stud bay (clearly outlining the framing) regardless of the type of clapboard or the orientation of the wall. It is even growing on the newly built addition, which is well-vented and insulated, and on the uninsulated, free-standing garage. What could be causing this and how can it be cured?*

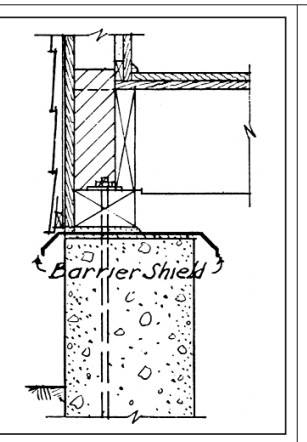
A. The growth you see on the siding could be mold, but it is more likely a moss. The shadowing occurs because the wood studs in direct contact with the siding absorb moisture and conduct heat from the interior of the building to keep the temperature of the siding over each stud more constant. This reduces the amount of dew that accumulates on this part of the siding and limits the growth of the mold or moss.

Either mold or moss can be removed with a high pressure washer. Adding some chlorine bleach to the water will help kill the spores from both. The lead in the old oil-based paints inhibited the growth of mold and moss. Nowadays a mildewcide can be added to the new paint which will help to some extent.

Termite Barriers

Q. *Should the holes in a termite shield be sealed around the anchor bolts? If so, how?*

A. All holes and laps in a termite shield should be sealed, preferably with roofing cement. Termites can pass through a crack 1/64 inch wide,



so a barrier shield must be well-sealed to be effective. The shield should project at least two inches on the diagonal on both the inside and the outside of the foundation (see illustration below). This is seldom done, however, because it interferes with the siding and the interior finish in basements.

Sizing Attic Ventilation

Q. *What rules of thumb should be used for sizing attic ventilation?*

A. If there is a vapor retarder in the ceiling, the net free area of attic ventilation should be at least one square foot for every 300 square feet of ceiling. If there is no vapor retarder, the net free area should be one square foot for every 150 square feet of ceiling. This amount of ventilation should be evenly divided between high and low vents. The net free area of most commercially available ventilation devices (grilles, eaves and ridge vents, roof vents) is marked in square inches. In general, if the vents have a 1/4-inch insect screen, the net free area is half the actual area. But if vents are covered with window screen (14 wires to the inch), the vents have about one-third the net free area. ■

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