

LETTERS



Engineered Lumber Blues

To the Editor:

The article, "Engineered Beams and Headers" (8/91), really caught my attention. We are currently building a 6,000-square-foot house and have used Arrowood exclusively for all the floor joists and rafters. While we have had our difficulties, the overall finished product is strong and looks good. However, unlike Bill Smith (as quoted in the article) our experience working with Arrowood has been one headache after another.

A host of problems has stemmed from two inconsistencies: First, the height varied from the factory spec of 11¹/₄ inches to as much as 11¹¹/₁₆ inches. Try working with a 9¹/₁₆-inch tolerance when running solid blocking. Second, the thickness also varied from the factory spec of 1¹/₂ inches to as much as 1¹³/₁₆ inches. Now that will surely make your life difficult if you're trying to run blocking for a consistent layout! One can imagine how these two inconsistencies, coupled together, could raise some tempers as they reared their ugly heads board after board.

The advantages stated in DeKorne's article, such as "the big spans," are definitely worth it, but what a price to have paid. My advice to anyone considering Arrowood or any "manufactured wood" is threefold:

- Talk to your supplier and his/her distributor about commitment to size.
- Have your yard deliver in small lots because "dumping" is hard on the product, not to mention the difficulty of sorting through it.
- Finally, do some push-ups before you start framing or hire Arnold Schwarzenegger to help out.

Alex Carver
Ferrisburg, Vt.

In the Ballpark

To the Editor:

Can anyone come up with a way to deal with a customer who gives you an artist's conception of a remodel or addition and asks you for a "ballpark estimate"? Usually they say, "I won't hold you to this, but get it as accurate as you can."

Alvin J. Simpkins
Dunnellon, Fla.

Remodeling Consultant Linda Case Replies:

This kind of request can be extremely frustrating. You undoubtedly worry — and with good reason — that a less professional remodeler will lowball a "guesstimate" and steal the job out from under you, after you've done a lot of work.

First, put your consumer hat on. It would be very helpful strategically for you to find out why they are approaching the remodeling this way. Prospects like these undoubtedly feel that they have given you more than enough information to be quite accurate in your "ballpark estimate," and probably want your price to confirm whether or not they can afford the project.

Next, scope out the job, and get an accurate square footage count. Get answers from the consumer on some of the major expense questions and material specifications. Then, as with any ballpark figure, come up with a range.

The low side of the range should be the price you could actually remodel for if all the remaining decisions fell on the inexpensive side. The upper range should allow for a moderate amount of more expensive design decisions by the consumer. Make it clear to your prospect that much more specific information will be needed before you can give a meaningful final price. Be clear that, within the range, it is their decisions that will effect the final price.

Never underestimate the consumer's ability to understand logical and well-presented information on why you can only give them part of what they want. Your job as remodeler includes a heavy responsibility for just this kind of education and guidance. Good luck.

Can't Cover Up Smoke

To the Editor:

I read in "On the House" (9/91) a recommendation to use MAB Lok-Tite to "encapsulate the smell of smoke on fire damaged walls." As an insurance restoration specialist for 20+ years, I don't know of any paint or sealer that will permanently encapsulate smoke odor other than very light odor.

To effectively eliminate smoke odor the affected area must first be chemically treated to neutralize the odor before using a sealer to prevent stain bleeding. Sealers are not deodorizers, although under slight odor conditions they often will work. Sealers should only be used to prevent stains from bleeding through finish paints.

I liken sealing smoke odor to painting over rust...eventually it will come back to haunt you.

Robert J. Kasonik
Forest Hill Enterprises, Inc.
Charlottesville, Va.

Comp Benefits Too Small

To the Editor:

I just received the September 1991 issue and must respond to the statistics cited concerning workers compensation in "From What We Gather" (Eight-Penny News).

I suffered a work related injury four years ago which required a minimum of four weeks recuperation. My compensation for this recovery time was approximately one third of my normal pay. Faced with supporting a family on such a reduced income would force anyone back into the work force as quickly as possible.

I don't see that lower compensation benefits are to anyone's advantage (other than the insurance company's). The employee likely returns to work too soon, allowing for the possibility of a delayed or incomplete recovery. The employer is likely to have a less productive employee (who may have to leave the job again shortly after his return), or an employee who will have to carry with him "remnants" of his injury for the rest of his career.

If the insurance companies cannot provide the necessary benefits because of increased costs to themselves, perhaps they should put more effort into verifying the legitimacy of claims. If you have a legitimate claim to workers compensation benefits you should be compensated to a degree that allows you to recover completely before resuming work.

Mark Hallock
Two By Design
Capitola, Calif.

Duct Tape Failure

To the Editor:

I read with interest Henry Spies' response to the question on underground heating ducts ("On the House," 6/91). I was somewhat concerned over his recommendation to use tape as a positive closure system. Even higher quality tapes, such as the UL-181 rated aluminum types you mention, offer no assurance of longevity. In attics and crawlspaces in the Southeast, as well as in other parts of the country, I see even the best of tapes failing — often within months of their application. I am concerned that trusting a tape of any kind as a water barrier is ill-placed faith. It would make more sense to install a mastic type duct sealant as a positive closure system — such as that manufactured by RCD Corporation (P.O. Box 54706, Orlando, FL 32854-7606), or Foster Prod. Corp. (3200 LaBova Rd., Vadnais Hts., MN 55110).

In addition, supply leaks cause negative pressures in the house when the air handler is operating. Although this may cause a pressurization of the sub-slab area, the house will be negative and more prone to sucking in soil gas as well as moisture.

Based on much of the work being done by Florida Solar Energy Center and Natural Florida Retrofit, coupled with the frequent failures I have witnessed in tape-type closure system failures, I never, ever recommend tape anymore.

Frank L. Vigil
Senior Project Manager
North Carolina Alternative
Energy Corp.
Research Triangle Park, N.C.



Keep' em coming... We welcome letters, but they must be signed and include the writer's address. *The Journal of Light Construction* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail letters to JLC, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.