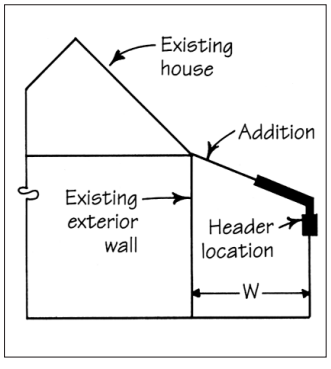
LETTERS

Header Question

To the Editor:

"Sizing Up Wood Headers" by Robert Randall (4/92) is a good and useful article. One question though: What is the load factor of the building addition drawn below?

Johan Bouwer
Waterloo, Ontario



Robert Randall responds:

The situation in the sketch is a load factor 25, functionally the same as the upper left case in the load factor table published. Half of the load of your roof span (indicated by "W" in the illustration) bears on the header. There are no floor loads involved. However, a case such as this must be approached with caution because you are adding loads to the existing wall. Wall framing, attachment details, and any headered openings in the existing wall must be reviewed for the additional loads imposed by the new roof.

Convection Loopholes

To the Editor:

The article "Should You Insulate the Basement?" (*Focus on Energy*, 6/92) was a good one, but the illustration bothered me a bit. We have found it critical (documented by the Canadian Housing Mortgage Corporation) that there be no air space between the inside insulation and the basement wall. Because of the very different temperatures on the top and the bottom of such an air space, a very strong convection loop is set up, creating a moisture pump that saturates the headers and joists quickly with whatever moisture is available from the wall or the slab. This is important enough in our climate that if the wall is not flat enough for foam boards to rest tight against the wall, you must use batts so they will follow the wall. We also ask that foam not be attached with globs of adhesive, which creates little stand-off "feet" that leave an air space. Adhesive should be applied horizontally with a caulking gun, not in dabs.

Jon Eakes
Montreal, Quebec

Contracts and Reasonable Customers

To the Editor:

Bob Theberge's comments (*Letters*, 7/92) regarding Michael McCutcheon's contract ("Change Orders for Design/Builders," 4/92) greatly oversimplify the situation. Let me count the ways:

1. No two building inspectors, even within the same municipality, interpret every aspect of the code the same way, and many inspectors are inconsistent in their interpretations.
2. The tenure of building inspectors is relatively short (at least relative to that of this builder who has been at it 12 years).
3. The speed of implementation of new regulations varies depending upon the municipality, and the interpretation of new regulations is very irregular for a period of time lasting for several months to over a year.

I also think the ethical argument raised by Mr. Theberge is not valid: No one is expected to know everything about his field. Further, if a design and the eventual construction must be upgraded to meet a code requirement not included by the designer, the owner should pay the additional cost, because he would have paid it if the original design had included the required upgrade.

Reasonable customers, knowing the facts, would concur and agree to a clause holding the design/builder liable only for those omitted code requirements readily foreseen by a reasonably prudent builder.

While I have much to say about contracts, a subject that has always interested me, I can offer little on finding enough reasonable customers so that one does not have to rely on the other kind.

In Brunswick, Maine, building inspectors may be less perplexing, and people, in general, a little more fair and reasonable, but in the real world, which down here is called South Jersey, it's a bit more complicated. Perhaps Mr. Theberge and I could trade places, businesses, and customers…

Eric Yonker
Atco, N.J.

Mediation Not Always Fair

To the Editor:

I have two comments in response to "Mediation: Peaceful Solutions to Client Conflicts" (7/92) by Larry Hayden and Herb Schwartz. I certainly agree with the authors that mediation is a vast improvement on arbitrated or court mandated resolutions to many contracting disputes. However, there are several factors your readers should consider.

Mediated settlements between parties of grossly unequal resources can result in very unequal resolutions. Since agreements are reached by the two parties directly, the weaker one may "give in" too soon for his/her own good. There is very little a mediator can do to prevent this. Arbitration may offer the much weaker party more true justice, since the arbitrator(s) may act to mitigate the power advantage of the stronger party.

It helps if the agreement has some teeth. The participants are more likely to follow through if they know that failure to do so will result in court action or some other penalty.

Paul Lipke
Hadley, Mass.

Ramp Refinements

To the Editor:

Our agency subscribes to your periodical, and we appreciate the practical construction information it provides. Your article "Ramps and the ADA" (9/92) was of definite interest to those of us who have worked actively for many years in the area of accessibility remodeling. I noted two points in the content of this article, though, that required follow-up:

The design guidelines for the Americans with Disabilities Act apparently do not mandate them, but lever-action handles are the preferred door hardware to accommodate persons with all ranges of finger/wrist ability. The sketch shows a knob-style unit.

The sketch shows the top and intermediate landings "sloped to shed water." The ADA guidelines and virtually every standard guideline on rampbuilding for accessibility call for all landing areas to be level. This safety requirement is particularly critical for wheelchair users, because if landings aren't level, a user must continually hold the chair stationary. If unable to do so or if control is momentarily lost, the chair may begin rolling and lead to an accident. As illustrated, a post-and-beam ramp with landings/running surfaces done in a gapped decking style should be adequate for rain/snow runoff, particularly if any cupping in the planks is positioned downward.

Diane L. Sprague
Accessibility Loan Program
Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
St. Paul, Minn.

To the Editor:

I have noted two problems with the illustration in the article, "Ramps and the ADA" (9/92):

For the type of railing depicted, with intermittent posts, the ADA requires either an extended width of 12 inches minimum on each side of the ramp platform or a curb on both sides at least 2 inches high.

The entrance door at the top of the ramp should have a lever, push type, or U-shaped handle, but not a knob you must turn with your wrist.

Milton Gregory Grew, Architect
Woodbury, Conn.

Controlling Humidity

To the Editor:

In your report "Energy-Efficient Builders Sharpen Skills" (*Eight Penny News*, 8/92), the last item, "To increase humidity control, specify an air conditioner that allows you to *increase* the amount of air moving over the coil during times of high humidity..." should read "*decrease* the amount of air..."

By slowing down the volume of air moving across the cooling coil, the temperature drop across that coil increases, thus forcing the air to further condense.

The tradeoff is that less air across the coil means slightly less efficiency, but if dehumidification is the primary goal (most of the time it should be) then why not?

F. Jeff McCarthy
Shelter Supply Inc.
Minneapolis, Minn.

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*, RR2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.