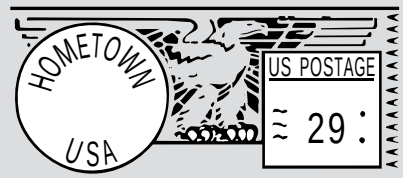
LETTERS



Code Changes Self-Serving

To the Editor:

After reading your recent article "After the Storm" (8/93), I have a word of caution. Beware when any building code agency begins to write new codes after a major loss event. Building code development agencies are run exclusively by building code enforcement officials (no one else votes). The temptation to take advantage of the situation to enact self-serving code changes is always there, and seldom is the temptation denied.

Based on my nine years of experience as a code enforcement officer, followed by service on major building code change committees, I have all too often seen the code outcome of what is known as "panic legislation." The tragedy of the moment, coupled with a public outcry for protection from disaster, is rich soil for the passage of building code changes that enhance the enforcement powers of interest groups, including building code enforcement officials and engineers (building officials are also usually engineers).

I urge contractors to take this situation very seriously. The long-term impact of panic legislation is almost always greater governmental regulation with a corresponding loss of control by the private sector. The greater the degree of governmental regulation, the less responsive the industry is to the market. The inability of an industry to adapt on its own to serve a market results in higher prices and lower levels of service.

Until all interest groups, including contractors, building material suppliers, building designers, consumers, and developers, are included in the building code development process by voting right empowerment, the process will continue to be subject to the abuse of the single interest group that controls it.

Al Smith, G.C.
Los Gatos, Calif.

Superior Seismic Connector

To the Editor:

I enjoy your publication. I look forward to reading it and always learn something from every issue. I am writing in regard to the article "Installing Seismic Framing Connectors" (7/93). I operate my own company, with framing/remodeling as our speciality. For a year my seismic hardware supplier tried to convince me to use the Advanced Connector System (made in Phoenix, Ariz.). I finally gave in and we now use their straps, nails, and clips.

At first I was stubborn about switching to the nail gun for attaching the hardware, but the infamous Simpson MST 60 with its 60-plus hand-driven 16d nails finally swayed me. In California, some remodels or houses can have 50 or more straps and 100 or more clips.

My Hitachi framing guns get a special $20 nose piece that slips over the "doughnut" on the hardware (see photo). The nose piece also acts as a flush nailer, an option usually sold separately for nail guns.

The system has its flaws — such as missing the strap or jamming. On one occasion we had to hack-saw the nail out of the gun.

But my labor for installing the hardware has been shortened by up to 75% on some projects. What my framers used to dread, they now enjoy because it is so easy.

No, I don't have any stock in this company, though I probably should. I just wish I had switched to this system earlier.

Jeff DeBernardi
DeBernardi Development
Pleasanton, Calif.

DOS Made Easy

To the Editor:

After reading the article "Moving From DOS To Windows" (*State-of-the-Art Contractor*, 8/93), I have a bone to pick with Craig Savage. He is always moaning about the dreaded DOS, how horrible it is. I beg to disagree. If you set up your computer correctly you never have to mess with DOS. Done well, most of your time is spent working within a particular program.

This is how I set up my computer: I wrote a simple batch program that acts as a menu. It lists all of my programs and gives each one a number. If I want to use Lotus 1-2-3, I punch in the menu item number and it loads Lotus. When I quit, my batch program automatically returns me to the menu. From there I can go to any of my other programs. If I need to fool around with copying files, etc., I use a software called Xtree Gold. It has been months since I typed in a single DOS command.

I know that there are other ways to accomplish this. Instead of crying how bad DOS is (and Savage is not the only one), a more positive approach is to look at how one can use DOS in a sane manner. I wonder about Windows, as it is a memory hog, requires lots of RAM, and is slow. And when it goes bad, it goes really bad. To make the most of it you need to purchase a loaded 386 or better. I can run all my stuff on a 286 with one meg of memory, and it's plenty fast.

I hope Savage will write an article along the lines of getting the most out of DOS. I am not a computer guru and have no desire to become one. The batch programs I wrote are simple stuff. With a hint or two anybody could write one. DOS is a tool — let's show people how to use it.

Gerret Wikoff
Los Angeles, Calif.

Cost-Free Cure

To the Editor:

Your September 1993 issue featured a letter to the editor from Robert Nelson on the dangers of scalding resulting from installation of low-flow shower heads. Mr. Nelson correctly states the danger to infants. He suggests installing flow restrictors instead.

I would like to suggest that the danger of scalding can be lessened by another simple, no-cost approach. Turn down the temperature to 120°F to 125°F. This will also conserve energy.

Mark Kubiniec
Niagara Community Action Program
Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Owls Not to Blame

To the Editor:

I'm getting tired of everybody whining about how the spotted owl and the environmentalists are causing our so-called lumber shortage. The only thing short is the foresight of the lumber barons. If so much timberland is the domain of the owl that it affects the entire country's supply, the owl's habitat certainly wouldn't be small or endangered. I keep reading about how renewable trees are — so why do we have a problem? The timber industry has been around long enough to have planted vast tree farms of mature timber. Where are the renewable plantation farms that could meet our need for decent lumber? What about Canadian imports? There must be a logjam at the border that reaches all the way to Japan.

By the way, it's been 20 years since the 1973 oil crisis, and we can burn all the gas we want. Amazing, isn't it?

Don Dunkley
Cool, Calif.

Venting I-Beams

To the Editor:

Although I agree with most of the article "The Energy Advantages of Wood I-Beams" (*Focus on Energy*, 6/93), I fail to see how the knockouts provide ventilation around skylights and hips. Since the hole is centered in the I-beam and the insulation continues to within 2 inches of the top, this would inhibit the flow of air between bays. Foam baffles could be used to compress the insulation in these areas, but that reduces the value of the insulation. What am I missing?

Doug Cooper
Princeton, N.J.

Bruce Sullivan responds:

Boise-Cascade and Trus Joist both locate the knockouts near one flange specifically for ventilation and wiring and plumbing. For some products, Willamette Industries allows a 1 1/2-inch hole to be drilled anywhere in the web. If the knockouts on your I-beams run down the center of the web, I suggest you look at one of these other products.

Or you can drill your own holes. But be careful. Requirements for drilling holes through wood I-beams vary by manufacturer and by product. Louisiana-Pacific literature specifies that holes must be drilled in the center of the web. If you want to drill holes yourself, be sure to consult the product literature for instructions on the size and location of the holes.

Correction

The correct phone number for *Simply Accounting* (*State-of-the-Art Contractor*, 10/93) is 800/225-5224.

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.