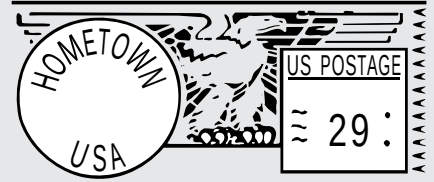


LETTERS



Felt a Vapor Barrier

To the Editor:

Your staff report on vapor barriers, "The Last Word (We Hope) on Vapor Barriers" (8/93), is a fine summary report that addresses many questions on vapor barriers. However, it is not quite the last word.

A table accompanying the staff report lists perm values for materials commonly used as vapor retarders (such as plastic films, foils, and building papers). The values listed correspond to perm values from ASHRAE based on the dry-cup method for all materials *except* for the 15-lb. asphalt impregnated felt, for which the perm value based on the wet-cup test is listed. Because the perm values for a given material vary greatly between the wet- and dry-cup methods, perm ratings should be based on the same test method when comparing the permeability of different materials for the same application. Perm values based on dry-cup tests should be used for materials commonly used for vapor retarder application. The perm value for 15-lb. asphalt impregnated felt based on the dry-cup method is 1.0, which means that it is a vapor retarder.

Your report may encourage some builders to use 15-lb. felt on the building exterior as an air infiltration barrier. This may create the potential for serious moisture problems. The small amount of water vapor leakage into the wall due to imperfect interior vapor retarders (openings for outlets, switches, etc.) is generally not a problem as long as this moisture can be pushed by thermodynamic forces through the wall to the outside. However, if there is a vapor retarder on the outside of the wall, the moisture may get trapped in the exterior sheathing and eventually cause the sheathing to rot.

We agree that correct application of vapor retarders and air infiltration barriers is necessary to protect thermal insulation and structural components from moisture damage. The vapor retarder must be installed on the winter

warm side of the thermal insulation and the air infiltration barrier on the exterior sheathing. This will keep the exterior structural cavity nearly moisture-free and provide for a more draft-free, energy-efficient home.

Larry Soeller
New York State Energy Office
Albany, N.Y.

Shower Heads Too Low

To the Editor:

After reading your article "Roughing-In for Kitchen and Baths" (12/93), I must warn anyone over 5 feet 6 inches tall that they will not be able to fit under the shower head shown in the article with a 72-inch rough-in height.

It has long been a pet peeve of mine that so many plumbers insist on placing shower heads so low that your head will not fit underneath.

I have shower heads on all my jobs, new construction or remodels, set at 84 inches so that people 6 feet tall or

taller will be able to get their heads under the shower head.

Mark A. Grebbin
Mark II Construction Co.
Foxboro, Mass.

Galvanized Opinions

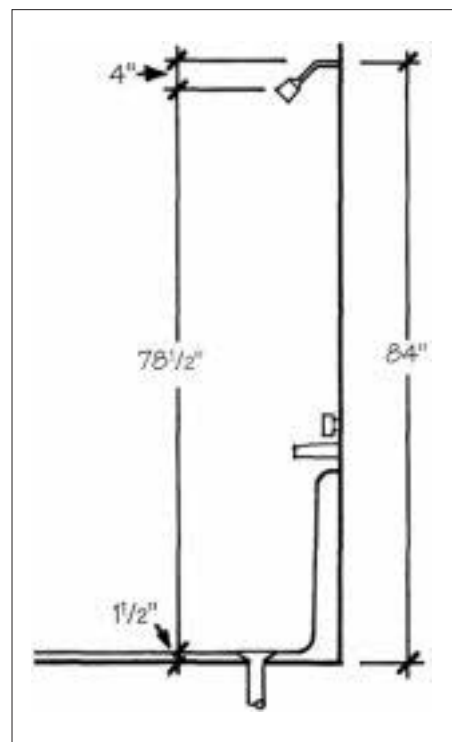
To the Editor:

We read with great interest the letter from Mr. Ding Kalis of the Air Nail Company ("Stainless Steel Worth the Cost," *Letters*, 11/93) stating that the use of stainless steel nails rather than hot-dipped galvanized nails will prevent "a dark stain" on redwood, cedar, or treated lumber.

Our experience has shown that stainless steel nails are not the absolute answer. What is commonly known as "extractive bleeding" in the industry, is probably more directly related to unwanted moisture getting into the siding and putting a variety of dark-colored natural substances into solution. As these water-soluble extractives migrate to the surface of the wood and the water evaporates, a dark stain is left behind.

The hole made in the siding by the nail, and the severed wood fibers, also contribute to these stains, which often show up around and below nails of any kind. Granted, poor-quality nails do often rust and discolor redwood, cedar, or treated lumber. But that does not explain the staining that occasionally appears around top-quality hot-dipped galvanized, stainless steel, or aluminum nails, or the extractive staining that can appear where there is no nail.

The California Redwood Assn., the Western Red Cedar Lumber Assn., and the Western Wood Products Assn. all continue to recommend the three categories of nails above. They also stress the importance of carefully following sound application procedures and applying top-quality finishes that help keep excessive moisture out of the



wood. Experts currently recommend finishes be applied to the front, back, and cut ends of siding.

Tom Koch
W. H. Maze Co.
Peru, Ill.

W. H. Maze Co. makes double-hot-dipped galvanized, stainless steel, and aluminum nails.

To the Editor:

We agree with most of Mr. Utterback's advice in his response to the "Wood Siding Problem" (*Letters*, 1/94). However, we disagree with the comments about a power nailer knocking zinc coatings off a nail's head. The single, straight drive from a power nailer is less likely to chip zinc off a nail than are the multiple strikes of a hammer, especially when delivered to the edge of the nail's head!

John Kurtz
Technical Director
International Staple, Nail & Tool Assn.
Chicago, Ill.

Sealant Savvy

To the Editor:

It was good to see the *Journal of Light Construction* take up the critical issue of high performance sealants (*Focus on Energy*, 10/93). As a company that has made only caulks and sealants for 19 years, we think some important clarifications need to be made.

Shrinkage is not an issue if the sealant is tooled properly. Squirting the sealant out of the tube and just letting it lie in the joint won't make a good seal.

Sullivan said that using a pigmented sealant will minimize shrinkage. It would be better to use a carefully formulated *clear* sealant than a colored one that has been cheapened by excessive filler load. He was correct that there is less shrinkage in the pigmented sealant; but shrinkage alone is not an indication of quality.

Cold weather is another confusing area. The water content and applicability of latex in the cold is one issue; failure after cure due to extreme cold is another. Some latex sealants are formulated to perform well below freezing

once cured. A few perform well at -10°F. It's important to make sure the product matches the intended use.

Condensation or frost on the surfaces to be sealed will defeat a good bond by most products regardless of the method of tooling. However, there are a few products that can be applied in wet areas. Search out products approved for that use.

David Kratowicz
Geocel Corporation
Elkhart, Ind.

JLC's New Size: You Can't Please Everyone

To the Editor:

I Hate It! I Hate It! I Hate It!

What did you people do? This was a hands-on throw-it-around type of magazine. Now I'm waiting to see it at the checkout counter in the grocery store.

Don't get me wrong. The articles are still great. But, the down-sizing of your magazine does not do justice to your pictures and drawings.

Please bring back the old size magazine or at least enlarge the photos and drawings.

Paul D'Amore
Sandown, N.H.

To the Editor:

I like the new size!

Yes, the old size was "distinctive," but a nuisance to store.

Robert Fleming
Santa Ana, Calif.

Correction

The correct name for the EPS form manufactured by American Polysteel Forms of Albuquerque, N.M., is *The Polysteel Form*, not 3.10 Insulated Forms as we reported in the article "Foam Foundation Forms" (12/93).

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.