LETTERS

Green Board Fails Again

To the Editor:

In your *On the House* section in the January 1995 issue, you responded to a question about vapor barriers and potential moisture problems. As the past customer service manager for a major builder, I had the unfortunate task of rebuilding approximately 30 ceramic tile shower enclosures due to problems created by the presence of a vapor barrier.

The problems occurred because the exterior walls of the showers had a 6-mil polyethylene vapor barrier over the inside face of the insulation. Green board drywall was used over this, and then ceramic tile applied with mastic. Because of the cold winter weather outside and the high moisture/humidity inside the shower, the vapor barrier provided an excellent surface for condensation to form between the vapor barrier and the drywall. Within months, the drywall deteriorated. In fact, the drywall had gotten so bad in so little time, it was hard to even verify green board had been used at all.

Even by using a cement board rather than green board drywall, there is still substantial moisture buildup, causing mildew growth and potential framing damage. I suggest that in colder climates, the vapor barriers should never be installed on exterior shower walls. After demonstrating the damage to local inspectors, they agreed and removed this provision from the local building codes.

Jerry Simon
President, Illinois Building Inspection
Crystal Lake, Ill.

Clayton DeKorne responds:

In the examples Mr. Simon points to, the problem is not the vapor barrier, but the lack of good wall insulation and air sealing, and the use of green board (water-resistant drywall) behind the tile.

Vapor barriers do not cause moisture to condense. If the walls had been better insulated, the vapor barrier would never have been cold enough for moisture to condense on it. Eliminating the vapor barrier only means that the moisture will condense on the next available surface (probably the framing and sheathing).

To avoid problems with tile and tile substrates, concentrate your efforts on insulating the exterior walls of the shower area, making sure to avoid gaps in the insulation where air can pass. Then install a waterproof membrane. Don't just staple poly up, but caulk or tape overlapping joints and all edges. Or use 30-lb. building felt, sealing the joints, edges, and staples with asphalt cement.

Finally, never use green board as a tile substrate. No builder can ensure that the tile grout is perfect, and inevitably the tile substrate will get moist as water from the shower seeps through. As Mr. Simon documents, moisture-resistant drywall won't hold up to excessive amounts of moisture. The answer: Use cement backerboard or a mortar bed in the shower and bath stall. Save the green board for the other walls in the bathroom.

Thermal Barrier Required Over Interior Foam

To the Editor:

While the article "Air-Sealing Truss Floors" (4/95) makes sense where permitted, your readers should be cautioned that not all codes permit foam board on the interior of basements unless covered by a thermal barrier. New York State's building code, for instance, defines such a thermal barrier as "a noncombustible protective shield which … shall remain in place and provide fire protection for at least 15 minutes" (1/2-inch gypsum board, for example).

Lewis J. Olmsted, Jr.
Baldwinsville, N.Y.

Lead Carpenter Manual

To the Editor:

Remodelers are experiencing an acute shortage of skilled labor. John Sylvestre of Sylvestre Construction has met this problem by training within his company. I would like to thank John for sharing this information in his article "Training Lead Carpenters" (3/95).

It can be argued that the lead carpenter system is the most efficient way to manage a remodeling company. The National Association of Home Builders' Remodelors Council has recently published the *Lead Carpenter System: A Guide for Remodelers*. This manual explains the lead carpenter concept and job description, and contains many checklists and forms necessary for implementing this system. The book can be purchased from the NAHB bookstore (800/368-5242, ext. 463).

Curtis R. Ostrom, CR, CKD
C.N. Ostrom & Son Inc.
Wayzata, Minn.

Charge for Overhead

To the Editor:

Just a word to other small builders and remodelers: Don't undervalue yourselves. There may be small jobs where the rate you have to charge to cover overhead and profit seems awfully high for what you are doing. But not only is it nice to actually make a little money, but if something does happen (say you drop a pry bar on a tub), you can afford to have it fixed and not even break a sweat. Then, when you get over feeling stupid, you're right back in the game.

Duane V. Prevost
Prevost Building and Remodeling
Las Vegas, Nev.

Keep 'em coming! Letters 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; or e-mail to 76176.2053@compuserve.com.