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BPA INTERNATIONAL

JLC's

Letters

To Vent or Not To Vent?

To the Editor:

The article "Crawlspace Ventilation Update," by Don Best (8/99), is one of the most important articles that you have published in recent years. If you had included information on the mechanics of relative humidity, to explain that the capacity of air to hold water vapor increases and decreases when temperature increases and decreases, this would have provided a complete factual authoritative source of information for presentation to code officials.

Howard Brickman
Brickman Consulting
Norwell, Mass.

A Skeptic

To the Editor:

As building inspector for James City County in the Williamsburg, Va., area, I have encountered hundreds of single-family homes with premature decay of wooden joists and girders created by excessive moisture in the crawlspace. Based on my experience, I am apprehensive about some of the concepts contained in the article, "Crawlspace Ventilation Update" (8/99). While it is absolutely correct that some traditionally designed ventilated crawlspaces have significant moisture problems, the same statement can be made about insulated crawlspaces built fully in accordance with the new theories. Defenders of the new theory always say that it works if moisture is controlled in the crawlspace. Exactly the same statement can be made about ventilated crawlspaces.

If moisture intrusion into the crawlspace is not prevented or controlled, then insulated crawlspaces create conditions where elevated temperatures create the potential for decay organisms to flourish all year round. With a ventilated crawlspace, the organisms are dormant in cold weather, so problems are limited to warm weather.

It has been my experience that no two problem crawlspaces are identical. Consequently they respond differently to a variety of treatments. Problem crawlspaces often represent a complex interaction of conditions. Crawlspaces sealed in dry conditions, such as the summer of '99, could have dramatic moisture changes when normal rainfall resumes. Most owners don't do periodic inspections of their crawlspaces, and may discover severe problems years later.

The overwhelming majority of homes with code-compliant ventilated crawlspaces do not have significant premature decay in the crawlspace, even after decades. That fact is frequently overlooked in the discussion of crawlspace ventilation. There is no substitute for quality original construction followed by ongoing monitoring of the crawlspace. I would strongly caution anyone who thinks they can seal a crawlspace and walk away from it.

Joe Basilone
Williamsburg, Va.

Tool Knockoff Clarification

To the Editor:

Your article on knockoffs (*Notebook*, 8/99) was very interesting. I have one

small clarification: Usually, "gray market" refers to a legitimate product manufactured for some other country than the one in which it is actually sold. For various reasons, sometimes distributors can buy a foreign-made product meant for another country cheaper than they can get it through regular channels. Usually these foreign versions are the same product, sometimes not. The different prices can reflect the manufacturer's cost of distribution, warranty history, expected legal expenses, and so forth.

Products usually sold in the U.S. "gray market" include Japanese camera equipment and expensive European automobiles such as Mercedes or BMW. However, the manufacturers will not honor U.S. warranties if the product was imported without their approval.

My point is that the product was indeed manufactured by the real manufacturer, but not intended to be sold in the U.S., as opposed to a "rip-off" product by some other producer who copies a successful product.

Joe Ross, Sr. Vice President
CIB Bank
Bolingbrook, Ill.

Clothes Washers & Dry Traps

To the Editor:

In his answer about air admittance valves (*On the House*, 8/99), Rex Cauldwell cites an instance where the draining of a clothes washer caused the downstream kitchen sink to lose its trap seal. He mentions drain pipe size and the fact that air admittance valves only react to negative pressure.

The August '99 issue of *PM* magazine discusses this issue in detail. The problem is that washing machine manufacturers have substantially increased the size of the pumps (to 17 gpm or more), so that a properly sized drain (to code) is inadequate for the amount of water these washing machines send out. It takes a 3-inch pipe to handle it. You can find the article, written by Julius Ballanco, at PMmag.com.

Robert Jordan
Portsmouth, N.H.

Electrical Code Confusion

To the Editor:

I'd like to make two comments on the article "Electrical Code Update" (7/99). Regarding fan support, my edition of the *'99 NEC* does not show an increase to 70 pounds; it still reads 35 pounds for boxes listed as suitable for fan support.

The other comment has to do with island and peninsular receptacles. You are correct that the code has backed off its earlier requirement, which allows a cabinet-side-mounted receptacle only with the approval of the "authority having jurisdiction." Unfortunately, I feel the code-making panel has bowed to aesthetics at the price of public safety. Receptacles mounted on the side of a cabinet are easily snagged by passing children and pets. Despite several severe accidents caused by this type of installation, the code-making panel loosened the requirements. Electricians and especially designers should be aware of this potential hazard and provide a safer location for a receptacle at an island or peninsula than the side of a cabinet.

Redwood Kardon
Berkeley, Calif.

Author Sean Kenney responds: Thank you for your comments. After rereading the article, I can see where the confusion on paddle-fan support stems from. The NEC *reference should have read 422-18(b)* exception, *where the 70-pound reference is contained.*

Regarding island receptacles, in a perfect world I would agree with you; but in our world, aesthetics do matter, especially to the customer.

In my opinion, however, the new code is safer than the old code because the old code was confusing and left the decision in the inspector's hands. For example, under the old rule, customers in my area would complain about having to look at a tombstone-style outlet. Facing this pressure, the inspectors would sometimes allow an island to be built without any receptacle at all rather than permit the side-mounted installation. Unfortunately, this could eventually lead to the use of extension cords to

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Mailing Address:
Journal of Light Construction
932 West Main Street
Richmond, VT 05477
802/434-4747

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power island appliances, creating an even more unsafe condition than the hanging cord from a side-mounted receptacle.

The new code rule is easy to read and is very specific as to where the receptacle should be installed. Perhaps the NEC *has somewhat compromised safety for the demands and expectations of the real world, but then what good is a code rule that will not be enforced for political reasons?*

Saying No Professionally

To the Editor:

I've found there are several benefits to saying "No" to prospective clients in a respectful and professional manner like those described by Paul Eldrenkamp in "Learning To Say No" (*Strictly Business*, 8/99). I treat all prospects equally and listen to them even if I know I'll be too busy to take on their project. This may be an extended phone conversation or sometimes a short preliminary meeting. I get good feedback on my marketing and reputation that a cursory "Sorry, I'm too busy" would never gather. And even when I do decline a project, I regularly get referrals from those clients.

I frequently refer "No" prospects to builder friends of mine who I think would be a good match. The prospects are happy because they have a good referral and the builder is happy for the work. This fosters good will and referrals back to me. And I feel better knowing I'm not "blowing someone off." It makes no sense to treat anyone that way: It makes you look bad and gives the residential construction business a black eye.

Mike Guertin
via e-mail

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*, 932 West Main St., Richmond, VT 05477; or e-mail to *jlc@bginet.com*.