JLC's

Letters

Where's the Fire Blocking?

To the Editor:

The detail shown on page 39 of the October 2001 issue (*On the House*, "Finishing Basement Walls") does not indicate fire blocking at the intersection between the wall and ceiling cavities, as required by most building codes. This is a commonly missed and important fire and life safety item in basement remodels. If you could help get the word out, I would appreciate it.

Rowland Zoller, Plans Examiner
Thurston County Development Services
Olympia, Wash.

Paul Fisette responds: You make a great point. The detail shown is how most people design and build this wall. However, technically it is incorrect and should include fire blocking, as you mention. The difference between this wall and other interior partitions is that both sides of the basement wall are not finished with drywall. Interestingly, every building inspector I spoke with missed this detail. Once the deficiency was pointed out, all of them agreed with your opinion. Some suggestions offered by the inspectors to remedy the design include installing fire blocking over the wall; installing unfaced fiberglass insulation to fully fill the joist bay from the sill line to a point 8 feet beyond the wall line; and running the drywall ceiling all the way to the sill before erecting the wall. My guess is that fire blocking is the best solution. Thanks for the keen eye.

Quality Insulation Worth Paying For

To the Editor:

I wanted to respond to a couple of items in your September issue. First, Bruce Harley (*Letters*) states that if you want a high-quality, conscientious batt installation from an insulation contractor, "you definitely have to pay for it." Why should this be any different from any other trade? If you want a quality insulation job, you shop for knowledge, execution, and reputation — not price and speed. Unfortunately, the insulation contractor is typically the lowest paid and most ignored trade on site. In the eyes of many builders and homeowners, our work can be done by any 15 year old with a stapler.

Why is it that if a roofer puts shingles on an existing home, he is not required to verify that the roof is vented at ridge and soffit, but if the insulator insulates the attic below that roof and it rots, the insulator is the turkey? Why is it that builders will leave a non-IC-rated recessed light exposed in the attic above the tub surround, then blame the insulator when the light fails, the pipes freeze, and the house grows ice by the ton?

On a more important note, the article on Zaring homes ("Mold & Moisture Bankrupt Big Builder," *Notebook*) haunts me. Given the data in the article, it seems the solution would have been a well-executed drainage plane and air barrier on the outside of the building envelope. It makes no sense to follow the advice of Stephen Vamosi to add another inch and a half of insulation "to avoid the dew point conditions." This would not have solved the problem, and it might have made it worse.

Pat Dundon, President
Dundon Insulation, Inc.
Windsor, N.Y.

Put Vapor Barrier Outside

To the Editor:

I found your article "Mold & Moisture Bankrupt Big Builder" (*Notebook*, 9/01) very troubling. The deterioration of the exterior walls of so many homes in Mason, Ohio, resulted in catastrophic losses to both the builder and the

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homeowners. Is this not just the sort of problem that building codes and departments are supposed to prevent?

I have been building in the Rocky Mountains for the past 30 years. The average altitude of my projects has been about 8,000 feet — surprisingly, a very dry climate. The exterior humidity is often lower than indoors, especially in the winter. Consequently, we use vapor barriers on the inside face of the framing. We use enough insulation to eliminate a dew point in the wall, usually R-19 in 2x6 walls.

I mentioned this article to a friend originally from Minnesota. He said he was surprised to see the polyethylene vapor barrier on the inside of the walls when he first came to Colorado. In Minnesota, he put the poly on the outside of the walls, because they have the opposite problem: The air conditioning creates an artificially low humidity inside the house, with often very high humidity outside. Therefore, I agree with the investigators who said that the problem in Ohio was water vapor trying to move through the walls and into the house. I do not agree, however, that simply adding thicker insulation would prevent the problem. Water vapor would still reach the polyethylene, which would be at the same low temperature, if not actually colder. A vapor barrier to the outside is a must. Thicker insulation then makes sense because it ensures that the poly stays warm and cannot condense the water vapor.

Patrick Hunter
Carbondale, Colo.

Soft-Start Router

To the Editor:

In the article "Buying a Plunge Router" (9/01), the author misstated an important feature regarding our model 3612C plunge router. The 3612C does in fact have a soft-start feature, along with additional advanced electronics such as variable speed and electronic speed control, to better maintain the desired speed under load.

Vince Caito
Marketing Communications Manager
Makita USA, Inc.

What's the Point?

To the Editor:

What's the point of the article "How Thick Is a Half Inch?" (*Notebook*, 8/01)? Users of structural panels (plywood and OSB) know that 1/2-inch panels are available if thickness is the quality they are looking for. A more important issue is educating builders about the stiffness and load capacity of panels with different span ratings. That would be a lot more effective than trying to engineer precision into panels where it is not necessary.

Tom Reierson
via e-mail

I-Joist Software

To the Editor:

I enjoyed the article "Choosing Engineered Beams" (9/01). One thing to note is that Trus Joist MacMillan is now just Trus Joist. Secondly, the author states that sizing software available from manufacturers does not allow complex sizing scenarios. This is not correct. Trus Joist's TJ-Beam software does allow point loads and other complex loading scenarios.

Brian McCall
North Michigan Tech Rep
Trus Joist

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*, 186 Allen Brook Ln., Williston, VT 05495; or e-mail to *jlc@bginet.com.*