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BPA

~ From the Editor

We Know How to Do This

Homes that can resist hurricanes are within reach

It's not a mystery. We *know* how to build and remodel houses that can resist the extreme wind and surge forces brought on by the worst hurricanes. That was the take-home message I carried away from a recent conference in Tampa, which addressed what we learned in the aftermath of the 2004 hurricane season. Each presentation at the Hurricane Symposium cosponsored by the International Code Council (ICC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reinforced the same general point: Older housing suffered the worst damage, while most of the homes brought into compliance with new building codes — those codes revised after Hurricane Andrew tore through southern Florida in 1992 — withstood the four new storms relatively unscathed.



ILLUSTRATION BY JOSEPH ADOLPHE

Sure, there are still a few building rules that need some work. Soffits overwhelmingly seemed to allow in far too much wind-driven rain (see "Roof Ventilation for Coastal Homes," this issue). Beachfront piling foundations would have benefited from an extra freeboard height to raise them past Ivan's surge, and strong arguments persist for V-zone foundations throughout Coastal A zones (see "Piling It On," Fall 2004; available at www.coastalcontractor.net). But for the most part, none of the damage wrought in 2004 was that surprising. We know how to do this. Yet the question remains: How do we avoid the devastating losses to coastal homes that persist each hurricane season?

In the debate of the symposium's closing panel discussion, the answer boiled down to two "E" words: Education and Enforcement. If we know how to do it, but it's not being done, the responsibility falls first to the builders to learn what to do, and second to the inspectors to insist that it gets done. I happen to hate the enforcement argument. It sounds much too controlling for my taste. I prefer to think that builders and remodelers want to do the right thing, and that they will if they know what to do. That makes room for the education part. But it would be naive to think that was enough. Strong codes — codes that are actually followed by everyone — ultimately serve the interests of the best builders and remodelers.

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