

Letters

Radon Check During Excavation

Scott Anderson's "Foolproof Cure for Wet Basements" (12/05) is a great article with a lot of helpful detail.

One additional step that could help homeowners would be to check the radon levels in the basement during the excavation work. In homes west of the Mississippi, you can use an \$80 radon detector for a period of three to four days in the basement. If the radon levels are higher than the recommended minimums, the interior perimeter drainage system can be used as a collection system to remove the radon gas.

If the homeowner doesn't want to spring for a radon fan, at least the piping for the evacuation system can be installed before the concrete pour.

Michael Lowery

Electronic Site Services
Colorado Springs, Colo.

Beware Backfill Pressure

Having read Mr. Anderson's article on basement drainage systems, I wanted to add a word of caution about the tremendous force that the earth backfill places on the outside of the basement wall.

I was contracted to finish the inside of a basement after a perimeter drain was installed there. The drainage contractor had removed the concrete basement floor all along the back wall in one continuous cutting approximately 2 feet away from the inside concrete block wall.

Overnight, the back wall shifted off the footing and collapsed, and the rear of the house dropped quite a bit.

For whatever reason, there was no provision to back up the support that the concrete floor provided to the base of the block wall. Most basement floors are poured after the walls are in place, which in my area is called a floating slab. That this support was gone had disastrous consequences.

KEEP 'EM COMING!

Letters must be signed and include the writer's address. *JLC* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail to *JLC*, 186 Allen Brook Lane, Williston, VT 05495; or e-mail to jlc-editorial@hanleywood.com.



Notice to Purchasers of *JLC Field Guide*, Volume 2

We have recently published the second volume of *JLC Field Guide to Residential Construction*. Volume 2 covers electrical, plumbing, hvac and energy, and interiors. We hope it will be a useful tool for the builders and remodelers who purchase it.

Unfortunately, it has come to our attention that some errors crept past our editorial production team in the first press run. Since some of these are content-related, we wanted to bring them to the attention of anyone who has already purchased Volume 2. We have created a Web page at www.jlcbooks.com/updates where you can view and download PDF images containing the corrected information.

We appreciate your understanding and ongoing support as we strive to bring you the most accurate, up-to-date, and useful building information available. — *The Editors*

Thankfully, no one was hurt. But to the chagrin of the contractor, a hefty, expensive repair ensued, including having to excavate most of the back yard, installing emergency support for the house, and placing a new reinforced concrete basement wall and drainage system.

In hindsight, either the trench should have been cut in shorter sections or some sort of temporary shoring and support at the base of the wall should have been provided.

Martin A. Suttle, Owner

Martin A. Suttle Construction
Beavercreek, Ohio

Letters

Nothing's Foolproof

Regarding the article "Foolproof Cure for Wet Basements": I'm not sure anything is "foolproof."

The interior perimeter drainage system has its place and can work very well. However, I don't think your magazine should suggest it's foolproof and has no limitations or potential concerns.

Joseph D. Shuffleton, PE
Sterling, Va.

Spanish: Good for Business

Andy Podoliuk (*Letters*, 12/05) represents a viewpoint I find as offensive as the offense he took at "¿Habla Español?" (8/05). In a perfect world, no one would go anywhere or do anything without speaking the host country's language perfectly. And every immigrant would speak English before applying for any position.

But the reality of the marketplace suggests that we might be well-served to accommodate our friends and neighbors who don't yet have the language skills they might need but who are otherwise dedicated, reliable employees. Nobody's cramming Spanish down my throat, and while we do encourage our Latino employees to study English, we also find it pretty darn efficient to communicate with them in Spanish. It builds trust and minimizes errors. Perhaps learning a new language in their adult years is not their forte. To me, communicating in Spanish is not "bending over backwards." It's just a good business decision.

Peter Jessop
Integrity Development and
Construction
Amherst, Mass.

Mold Precautions

The dangers to people in construction posed by mold ("Mold and the Law," *Legal*, 11/05) are real, but stem mainly

from public hysteria, fomented by the legal trade. The author's statement that "people have died because their lungs were bleeding" from a mold reaction is unsupported by any science that I am aware of.

The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies released a study of the known science on mold in May 2004, and found no clear link between mold and health effects. The committee also concluded that while mold may induce asthmatic symptoms in asthmatics who are sensitive to it, the evidence wasn't strong enough to demonstrate a causal relationship.

But though there seems to be little danger of death, you can easily be ruined in court if you have been negligent in preventing excess moisture in your buildings. The precautions urged by the author should be taken seriously, if only to keep the lawyers at bay.

Carl Mezzoff, AIA
Stamford, Conn.

Source for Rising Hinges

Approximately 20 years ago, I purchased 4-inch butt hinges that raise the door as it swings inward about an inch, so that it can pass over throw rugs.

I don't remember the manufacturer, but I remember the name of the hardware company — Constantine's, in Yonkers, N.Y.

I haven't seen these hinges anywhere else and haven't been able to locate the catalog. Can anyone help? This is a great product. Thank you.

Dick Mitchell
Scituate, Mass.

Rising butt hinges are still available from Constantine's (800/443-9667) in both 3-inch and 4-inch sizes for either right- or left-hand doors. — The Editors

Human Counterweights: Bad Idea

I was appalled at the photo you chose to print in "Very Old Growth" (*Backfill*, 1/06). I refer to the bottom left photo showing two workers serving as counterweights.

First of all, if an added counterweight is needed to lift a load, this is a strong indication that the forklift is lifting beyond its load limits.

Second, the two employees are being subjected to an unacceptable risk. They are vulnerable to a serious injury if there is any sudden movement of the forklift; their body position is absolutely unacceptable.

Other than the operator, no riders should be allowed on any moving heavy equipment.

Jack L. Hawkins
Senior Safety Officer
Fermi National Accelerator
Laboratory
Batavia, Ill.

Soggy Competition

I happened to be on the mall in Washington, D.C., when the Solar Decathlon, featuring student-built solar-powered houses, opened to the public (*In the News*, 12/05).

Unlike the blue sky shown in the photos accompanying the article, the sky that day was dumping buckets from the remnants of Hurricane Rita. Inside many of the houses, students were scrambling with wastepaper baskets and mops, trying to sop up the rainwater streaming in through their roofs.

Perhaps for next year's competition, one of the houses can make use of an energy-producing waterwheel.

Tom Greggs
Seattle

Strength of Wet Panels

The response to the question “Does flooding damage framing lumber?” (Q&A, 11/05) mostly hit the mark. However, the reader is led to believe that the process of wetting and drying compromises the integrity of plywood and OSB. Clearly this is not the case.

Structural plywood and OSB are made with water-resistant adhesives that retain their strength when wet. Although the panels will be rougher from water exposure, they will most likely still be structurally sound. Panels saturated with water will feel less stiff than those in a dry condition. Once the panels are dry, strength typically returns and only minor repairs to isolated delaminated areas may be necessary.

APA-trademarked plywood with water-resistant adhesives will contain the words “Exposure 1” or “Exterior.” OSB sheathing is made with water-resistant adhesives and will also say “Exposure 1.”

Kevin Hayes

APA-The Engineered Wood
Association
Tacoma, Wash.

Paul Fisette responds: I think we agree on this. Structural OSB and plywood do withstand some wetting, as you describe. My point is that if composite products and, say, metal truss connections are submerged for 10 days or more, I would be

concerned about their performance. Structural panel products like OSB and plywood were designed for wetting during normal construction, but not for two weeks' submersion under water.

Stair Stringers: Watch the Run

I'm writing concerning “Housed-Stringer Exterior Stairs” (11/05). As I am not a carpenter, much of the article was beyond my needs, but as a code inspector, the part that was germane to my job caught my eye.

The article gives instructions for laying out and cutting a stair tread $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide. The problem here is that the required “nosing to nosing” tread dimension (“run” in the article) for residential construction is 10 inches minimum (11 inches in commercial.)

I believe that it's geometrically impossible to achieve a code-conforming tread width if the stair stringer cutout is not also 10 inches.

When measuring run, carpenters often think in terms of the distance from the riser board to the “overhang” (nosing), as this is the size of the lumber required.

Unfortunately, this will result in a nonconforming tread width every time, in the amount of the overhang. Many a stair has been rebuilt in Portsmouth because it was short by the overhang

dimension.

By the way, it was great to see in the photograph that these stairs included a prominent (but often missed) “graspable handrail.”

Richard A. Hopley

Chief Building Inspector
Portsmouth, N.H.

Author Andy Engel responds: For anyone working under the new International Residential Code, you are absolutely right. The stair in the article was built in Connecticut, where the local code requires a minimum 9-inch run.

Working Wireless

I agree with David Grubb (*On the Job*, 10/05) on the usefulness of on-site Internet access. We've been using the Verizon air card with great success. In town, it's broadband and very fast. It also works — although a little slower — anywhere there is cellular coverage. It worked for me in Boston and Seattle and while traveling on I-5 for more than an hour.

I use it for sending job-site photos and for answering e-mail while waiting for inspectors or when I'm having my oil changed.

It's great to be able to watch the weather radar, too.

Thomas R. Payne

Craftsman Homes Group
Portland, Ore.