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Fiber-Cement Clip

For the letter "Getting Things Right" (12/06), you show a picture of fiber-cement lap siding (reprinted at left). Looking closely, I see what looks to be a J-clip of some sort — it's at the bottom of the butt joint in the siding. I'd like to know what this is. We've been having problems with buckling of fiber-cement siding, and I wonder if the clips might provide a more secure attachment.

T.J. Parent
Queen Creek, Ariz.

The editors respond: The clip visible in the photo is an "off-stud joiner" clip manufactured by Simplicity Tool Corp. of Portland, Ore. (503/253-2000, www.simplicitytool.com). Made specifically for fiber-cement siding from 24-gauge G-90 galvanized steel, it registers off of the course below and provides a 1¼-inch overlap for the next course. The clip supports both sides of a butt joint, allowing you to break the course between studs, and also provides a smooth backing for caulk joints.

Although it will speed installation, the clip probably won't prevent buckling problems.

More on Employee Theft of Clients

I would like to respond to Ron Edge's letter (11/06) about employee theft of clients. This happens to all of us from time to time. It's a real thorn in my side because it also increases my exposure to liability. I know this from experience, because I went to court about it and lost.

A craftsman who worked for me was terminated for just this kind of activity. He then went out, got his own license, and started soliciting work from my clients, telling them he was now licensed and could do the work cheaper. Some former customers hired him, but when he realized he was in over his head, he abandoned their job, took their money, and disappeared. Although he'd contracted the job using his own forms, company name, and license number, the customers came after me. (This was almost two years after we had terminated him.)

To make a long story short, we lost: The judge said that the customers never would have met the craftsman if I hadn't sent him out there in the first place, so I was ultimately responsible. I had to remodel their bathroom!

My company employs 30 to 50 craftsmen, depending on the season. I cannot afford this exposure to liability, so we have implemented some procedures in how we hire. Each applicant listens to a 30-minute history of the company and how we work, including an explanation of our zero-tolerance policy regarding customer solicitation. We also explain that we use a "quality assurance" program designed to increase our level of customer service. Each new employee signs an agreement accepting our zero-tolerance policy, as well as a confidentiality agreement and a covenant not to compete.

We now use a mystery shopping company; they charge $70 per "shop," which is about average. The company has employees in our zip-code areas of service; they call us anonymously, requesting an estimate. We have no idea who they are when this happens. The "shopper," posing as a homeowner seeking to have work done, has a checklist and a series of questions to ask.

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This person is watching to see if our company's representative shows up on time, leaves a written estimate, wears booties when entering the home, and so on. During the appointment, the shopper asks our employee in passing about doing work on the side.

Afterward, the company forwards us a copy of the checklist results and answers to the questions that were asked, along with the name of our employee. That's when we find out we've been "shopped." This allows us to compare our employee's behavior to our company standards; if anyone has answered "Yes" to the question about working on the side, we will fire that employee.

The mystery-shopping company does two or three shops a month for us. To make sure that every craftsman is scheduled for one of these appointments, from time to time we make arrangements to send a particular employee on one of the visits.

By the way, all employees are informed of this program during the hiring process; they sign a document allowing us to do it.

Sky Ucci
Modesto, Calif.

Misconceptions About Attic Ventilation

Regarding the discussion about attic venting ("Getting Things Right," *Letters,* 12/06): I work for a weatherization program in Vermont, and we know that venting does very little to cool shingles in the summer — but more important, that it also does very little to stop ice damming. Venting is at best is a Band-Aid that hides the true problem: heat loss.

Air-sealing the attic floor is the most important thing you can do to slow heat loss. Without that, the insulation won't perform anywhere near what it is rated for (unless it's closed-cell foam). I have seen vented attics with a solid wall of frost on the bottom of the roof sheathing. The venting in these cases was actually increasing the stack effect into the attic, making the problem worse.

Geoff Wilcox
CVCAC Weatherization
Barre, Vt.

Keep It Simple

I found Michael Sloggatt Jr.'s article, "Making Curved Crown" (12/06), very interesting. I certainly prefer his built-up method to the use of flexible products. Mr. Sloggatt's mathematical skills are impressive and leave me in the dust — dazed, confused, and wishing I had paid attention in school.

After reading the article, I realized that there is a simpler method for calculating the angle of the cuts — one that does not require trig. Here it is, in four steps.

A. Based on Mr. Sloggatt's radius of 9.5 inches, I calculated the length of the arc in this article at 15 inches, rounded:

(π x 2r) x .25 = 14.92

B. I divided the arc's length by the width of the segments used, 3/4 inch:

15 ÷ .75 = 20

C. 20 segments x 2 cut angles per segment = 40 cuts

D. Because I've assumed the arc is a quarter of a circle, I divided 90 degrees by 40:

90 degrees ÷ 40 = 2.25 degrees

This method works easily for any radius, other wall angles, and any segment size. Thank you for a fine article.

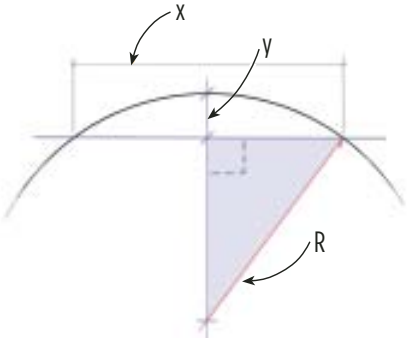
Jeff Johnson
Glen Allen, Va.

Checking Our Work

The formula for determining the radius of the arc in "Making Curved Crown" is overly complicated as well as flawed. If you want to prove me wrong, then demonstrate the proof for the formula that the author used in Step 5.

Stewart Bunn
Overland Park, Kan.

Editor Don Jackson responds: Now, there's a challenge that's hard to resist. The formula you're referring to can be used when, for example, you know the width and desired height of a segmental arch but need the radius to set up a router trammel to make casing or a support for brickwork. The proof is actually pretty simple, requiring nothing more complex than the Pythagorean theorem:



$$R^2 = \left(\frac{X}{2}\right)^2 + (R - y)^2$$

$$R^2 = \left(\frac{X}{2}\right)^2 + (R - y)(R - y)$$

$$R^2 = \left(\frac{X}{2}\right)^2 + R^2 - 2yR + y^2$$

$$2yR = \left(\frac{X}{2}\right)^2 + y^2$$

$$R = \frac{\left(\frac{X}{2}\right)^2 + y^2}{2y}$$