Letters

Questions About AFCI Rules

While I am in total support of sound building practices, the article "Expanded AFCI Requirements Spark Controversy" (*In the News*, 9/07) raises issues that are somewhat hypothetical and exaggerated. What I do not support is the use of our building codes as a conduit for sales. (The easiest way to get a product into the market place is to have it required.)

The idea of a company promoting its product through the design community or code review panels is nothing new. According to some building officials and designers I've spoken to, this is becoming more the norm. But how will housing ever be affordable if we continue to raise its price with new code requirements?

Charlie Rens
Arizona Image Homes
Peoria, Ariz.

Looking for Mac Estimator

I am a partner in a small construction business. I've just switched from a PC to a MacBook Pro and am looking for an estimating program that will run native on a Mac machine. The answer I get most often is to run Windows on my Mac, then select the program I want, but this seems like a hassle. I appreciate any help you can give.

Randy Johnson
Blue Lake Builders
Blue Lake, Calif.

Joe Stoddard, moderator of the JLC *Online computer forum, responds: I am always reluctant to make specific software recommendations without knowing specific needs. My general advice, though, is always the same: Do a top-down software evaluation. You can't determine the "how" — the software strategy — before you know the "why" and "what" — the objective you're trying to accomplish.*

When you say "estimating," remember that the devil is in the details: It can mean anything from simple lump-sum presales estimates to detailed line-item estimates that break out to a bill of materials.

You don't necessarily have to run Windows on your Mac, although that is the path of least resistance if you're looking for a Windows-like estimator. And you'll definitely find more dedicated estimating software for the Windows platform. That said, there are a few dedicated Mac estimating options.

Many Mac users have had success using the simplest approach: spreadsheets. There are at least three viable Mac spreadsheets that can be used for cost estimating.

Apple's new $80 productivity suite, iWork, includes a spreadsheet application called Numbers that you could use to create construction estimates.

NeoOffice, the Mac version of the open-source OpenOffice suite, includes a powerful spreadsheet application, and the price is right: It's free (www.neooffice.org).

Finally, the Mac version of Excel works pretty much like its PC counterpart, and the basic .xls file can be opened on

Correction

In the article "Roof Ventilation Update" (10/07), labels for two of the lines in the graph showing roof sheathing temperatures appear to be switched. The graph shows the temperature for "vented, white" as being higher than for "vented, dark." My experience with white roofs vs. dark roofs tells me this is impossible.

Thor Matteson
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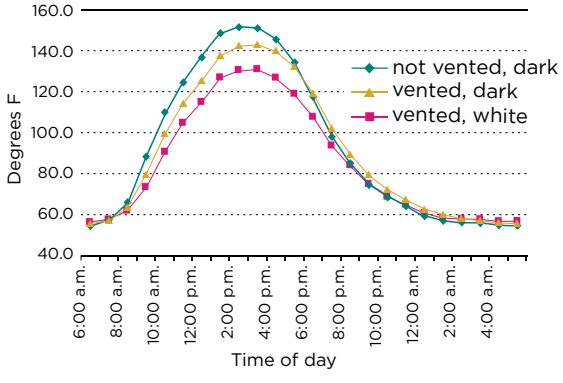
You're right. Thanks for pointing out the error. Here's the corrected graph. — The Editors

Temperatures at the top of the sheathing on a sunny summer day



either PCs or Macs. With Office 2008 for Mac right around the corner, cross-platform Excel files should get even easier.

Another option is programs based on FileMaker, a cross-platform database that developers use to build all kinds of Mac and PC applications. Because of the way FileMaker works, these applications tend to be all-in-one suites. Among the FileMaker-based Mac suites with integrated estimators are the 360 Difference Estimating version 2 (www.360difference.com), JobPro Central's suite (www.jobprocentral.com), and Eclectus' CMIS suite (www.eclectusinc.com).

Finally, Goldenseal has a unit-cost, assembly-based (vs. line-item) estimator built into its small business suite, an integrated product aimed at small-volume builders and remodelers. Goldenseal is available with ($695) or without ($395) an accounting module for both Mac and PC users (www.turtlesoft.com).

Fastening Underlayment

I was "floored" by the recommendations for fastening underlayment to the subfloor (*Q&A*, 9/07). I've been installing underlayment for about 50 years, in several thousand kitchens and baths, but I would never use nails of any kind to fasten underlayment to the subfloor. The No. 1 reason for using underlayment in the first place is to prevent the nail heads in the subfloor from popping up and damaging the flooring. If that weren't the case, then I could just use plugged-and-touch-sanded plywood subflooring in the areas that receive sheet flooring.

Lots of arguments can be made for why the nail heads pop up, but the main cause is shrinkage in the floor joists, both as they dry after installation and with seasonal changes in moisture content (meaning the shrinkage can never be completely stopped).

I've always fastened underlayment to the subfloor with divergent-point staples — 2 inches on-center on the edges and 4 inches on-center in the field — and I've never had a failure. I was taught this method by a journeymen carpenter; in those days, the staple gun had not even been invented, so we stapled with a mallet-powered stapler. Most of the subflooring was "recycled" 1x6 form boards — "green," way back then.

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