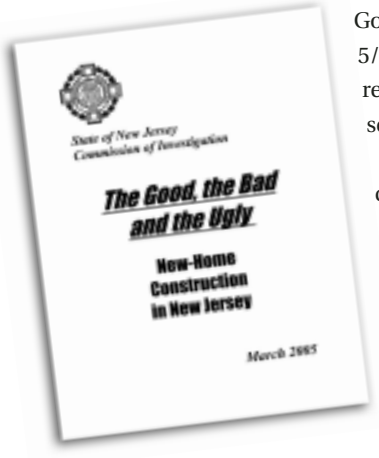
Letters

The Good in New Jersey



As a frequent reader of your publication, I was a bit surprised at the article regarding the New Jersey Commission of Investigation report "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" (*In the News,* 5/05). Although scandal sells, fair and balanced reporting is often a more effective way of presenting the truth.

The selection of quotes printed from the commission's report gives a slanted view of the overall success of the code-enforcement process in the state of New Jersey. The code officials that I represent are some of the best trained and most well-respected professionals in the U.S. Unfortunately, as the SCI report contends, there were a limited number of code officials identified during the course of the two-year investigation who had violated the state's high standards regarding conflicts of interest and ethics. Those individuals have been dealt with, and in some cases their licenses have been revoked. In one instance, the nature of the violation was the result of a construction department accepting a tray of bagels from a builder as a thank-you for assistance with a project.

As with any industry, there are some individuals who operate outside the law. The actions of those individuals make better press than the daily actions of the thousands of hard-working and dedicated officials who work throughout the state in order to ensure the safety and security of our residents.

As one of the individuals asked to appear before the commission to offer testimony, I was pleased to see that many of the suggestions that our association made for industry-wide reform were incorporated within the report's final recommendations. Do changes need to be made? Yes. Currently there are a number of proposed changes to the regulations that will result in tighter controls over the construction industry, and the inspection and permitting process as well. Together, the contractors and building departments will continue to make New Jersey one of the safest and most well-built places to live.

Stephen D. Jones
President, Building Officials Association of New Jersey

Snow-Covered Vent Pipes

After reading the article "Carbon Monoxide Death Spurs New Look at Old Problem" (*In the News,* 4/05), I felt I had to comment on the importance of having a CO detector. I live in a condo complex and we just had an instance this past winter where people were overcome by this deadly, odorless menace. Fortunately, they are fine; however, it was a wake-up call for all of us in our complex.

This problem occurred when the outside vent was covered by snow that had fallen off the newly installed metal roof, causing gas to back up inside. As a result, our heating system vents had to be relocated; some were routed up through the roof and some were located higher on the wall.

We have an older system that had a recall that had never been addressed — a PVC vent pipe known to crack under high heat. Nothing was ever sent to us as the owners of the system, and the problem was never taken care of. We learned about it when a serviceman found a cracked part and shut down the burner, refusing to turn it back on until the vent was replaced. Our furnace has been fixed and I've also installed a CO detector nearby. CO detectors should be a priority just like smoke detectors; hopefully the national building codes will address this soon.

Marcella Waldron
Enfield, N.H.

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.

Letters

Still Confused About The Safety Factor

Regarding Rick Barta's thoughtful observation on overbuilding (*Letters,* 4/05) and Joe Loferski and Frank Woeste's response, I'm a little confused. Apparently the authors believe contractors should overbuild by 250 percent the numbers in the code. The code specifies 200 pounds in any direction on a handrail, and the authors are urging us to build for a 500-pound load. Logically, this means we should design our floors for 100 pounds per square foot, and our snow loads for 75 or 100 psf vs. 30 or 40 psf.

Why do you feel compelled to multiply the code-designated 200 pounds for handrails by 2.5, but not to multiply the code-designated 40 pounds per square foot for floor joists by anything? I am unfamiliar with a code that calls for 11-psf floor joists and notes that we should multiply that by 3.75. This to me is the question Mr. Barta was asking. If the code is inadequate at 200 pounds, then your beef is with the engineers who advised the writing of the code. Overbuilding a floor by 25 percent makes for a nice, stiff floor; overbuilding by 250 percent does not sound rational to me.

Win Redding
Architrave, LLC
Wales, Wis.

Frank Woeste, P.E., responds: The safety factor is applied not to the design load, but to the lumber and connections. The safety factor ensures that when loaded, every piece of lumber and every connection (except for a very small percentage) will be able to carry the full design load. Because of the variability in lumber and connections made in the field, most connections and pieces of lumber, when tested, are actually around 2.5 times as strong as they need to be. But occasional pieces of lumber and some connections are not as strong, and that is what the testing is for — to make sure that the weakest pieces of lumber in a given grade and the weakest connection will still carry the necessary loads.

If, for example, you wanted to prove that a new residential floor-joist product meets building-code provisions, the new joist product would need to carry, on average, a uniform load of 2.5 x 50 psf (40-psf live load plus 10-psf dead load) — or 125 psf total. If you were to test a truckload of ordinary stress-graded 2x10s available in a lumberyard, the average failure load would be about 3 times the design value of 40-psf live load plus 10 psf dead load, or about 150 psf.

The lumber industry has tested its joist products for decades, and hundreds of research publications show that the safety factor for the average tested strength value is around 3.0 — or higher. Deck posts are not exempt from the typical safety factors used for decades in structural applications. The use of significant safety factors in structural engineering explains why buildings rarely if ever collapse.

Quality Manufacturer

Last year, I finished construction on a home where we installed a Siemens surge arrestor in each distribution panel. When the indicator lights on one of the units didn't work properly, I mailed the unit to Siemens, along with a brief note and a copy of my purchase receipt. I just received from Siemens a check for the full amount I had paid for this replacement surge protector. Companies like this should be commended when they stand by their products.

Gary Comfort
Ponce Inlet, Fla.

Correction

We inadvertently ran the wrong photo with our description of KitchenAid's Double-Drawer refrigerator in the June Kitchen & Bath *section. Here's the correct photo.*