Letters

Missing Lintel

There's a lot of good information in the article "Installing an Egress Window in an Existing Foundation" (2/09). I couldn't help but notice, however, that there seemed to be no lintel installed to support the brick veneer.

Tom Greggs
Greggs Building Design
Seattle

In the article, the author points out that he installs brick lintels when they're needed. There was in fact one on this job, but the photo of its installation didn't make it into the final layout. — The Editors

A Cautionary Note

I work for a small forensic engineering company; we investigate residential construction failures. Admittedly, the cross section of the industry I see is limited, but cutting holes in basement walls, as shown in the February egress-window article, should not be undertaken lightly.

Assuming there is steel in the wall (and there should be, to resist the pressure of the earth), cutting a hole without making any provision for strengthening the wall is bound to cause trouble eventually. The missing piece of wall and steel is now replaced by a void, and the cut ends are held in place by the plate, the floor system, and the framed walls above. But are they strong enough to resist the weight of the earth on the outside? (Note that a structural header only helps support the floor above. It does not help strengthen the basement wall.)

If one were creating that hole in the foundation in the original construction, it would be prudent and probably necessary to ring the opening with additional steel to help transfer the loads around the opening. Why wouldn't this be necessary in the remodel?

I've seen many failures in new basement walls where windows were formed. No one should cut a hole without consulting a structural engineer. If you cut the same-size hole each time you do this job, you'll probably have to consult an engineer only a few times before you have standard solutions for each structural situation. Don't wait until the basement wall is sitting on the basement floor — as I've seen too many times — before consulting an engineer!

Joe Bates, P.E.
C2B Forensics
Carmel, Ind.

Sprinklers Not the Best Way To Save Lives

The letter concerning sprinkler systems in residential construction ("IRC Sprinkler Rule Misinformed," 3/09) prompted me to write. As a contractor and worker in the remodeling business for more than 25 years, I've been in thousands of houses in the Cleveland area. While I don't doubt that sprinklers save lives, I agree that the cost-benefit ratio does not justify mandating this in new construction. It would be far more beneficial to address the substandard electrical systems in our older housing stock. The downside is that local building departments would have to spearhead this effort, something they are loathe to do when it is far easier to squeeze builders on new construction. Considering — in addition to old wiring — the substantial lead-paint problem, rampant price depression and foreclosures, and generally antiquated house designs, demolition of a good portion of our tired housing stock would make far more sense and save far more lives.

Paul Zvirelis
Elyria, Ohio

Questionable Business Practice

My experience with Advanta was exactly the same as Mr. Sims' ("Credit Card Warning," *Letters,* 4/09). Can you imagine the reaction if we told our customers we were doubling their cost as a "business decision"?

Gene Newell
Gem Finish Carpentry
Oregon City, Ore

Letters

Solar On Site

I noticed your article "Clean, Portable Power" (*Backfill,* 12/08) about the development of a commercially available solar

generator. I thought you'd be interested to know these are already on the market; I just tried one (see photo, above) from Mobile Solar Power, a California company, and it worked great on site.

Guy Hopkins Semmes
Hopkins & Porter
Potomac, Md.

Epoxy Safety Warning

Thanks for Tom O'Brien's informative article about the use of borates and epoxy in rot repair ("Beating Wood Rot," 2/09). It's reassuring to read that the techniques he advocates are quite similar to my own. His recommendation to wear two pairs of gloves is good advice: I've found that after removing a torn glove, it's hard to get a new one onto my sweaty hand.

One thing he neglected to point out is the airborne health risk from sanding epoxy. Hypersensitivity associated with excessive exposure to inhaled epoxy dust — as with the liquid resin — is a cumulative process, much like a latex or poison-ivy allergy. The more you're exposed, the more sensitive you become. Wearing a properly fitting respirator is a good start. Using a sander attached to a vacuum with a HEPA filter and dust bag keeps the dust out of the air and makes disposal safer.

The length of time it takes to become allergic to epoxy varies from person to person. You might be able to go for years without feeling the effects of exposure, but once your body has had enough, you won't be able to employ this valuable technique ever again.

Paul Kempner
Paul's Handyman Service
Burlington, Vt.

Feedback from the Field

We tried the Spyder Scraper product after seeing it at our local contractor supply house and reading about it in your February issue ("Tool Show Roundup"). Fortunately, your write-up mentioned operating the reciprocating saw at half-speed. We were removing flooring adhesive and linoleum tiles from a smooth concrete floor. Within five minutes the scraping blades bent and then immediately broke off in the reciprocating saws. No work was accomplished — and because the broken shafts were jammed, the two tools had to be taken out of service for repair.

David Lose
Bigfork Home Works
Bigfork, Mont.

Correction

The article on the stimulus package (In the News, *4/09) misstates the dates within which certain remodeling projects can qualify for the energy improvement tax credit. In fact, the credit applies to projects completed between February 17, 2009, and December 31, 2010; the IRS is still working on guidelines for projects completed between January 1, 2009, and February 16, 2009. — The Editors*