

Letters

Facing an Expensive Regulatory Future

Your article “Lead-Safe Remodeling” (*JLC Report*, 1/11) contains several unflattering characterizations of those of us who have yet to complete the EPA lead safe training courses. Apparently we “don’t talk to other remodelers, don’t read any trade publications, and are just now hearing about the rule from someone down at the lumberyard.” Or worse yet, we’ve “made a conscious decision to work outside the rules and hope [we] don’t get caught.”

I would guess that there are quite a few who are *very* aware of the new regulations and are just trying to find the time to take a day away from work to attend the course — as well as figure out how to work yet another cost into our already burdensome expense outlay. While most people’s wages have frozen or shrunk and home values have declined, costs for contractors are fast on the rise. Sales tax, workers comp, unemployment insurance, fuel, and many other licensing fees are all steadily climbing as states attempt to fix their budget shortfalls on the backs of businesses. This is creating a situation where most people simply cannot afford even a small remodel from a legit company. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve watched potential clients practically clutch their chest when I give them my bid (and all these Saturday morning TV shows telling people they can do almost any project for under \$5,000 aren’t helping). Since the new rule went into effect I’ve been working on post-1978 houses and trying to plan ahead for when I will take my training. I’ll comply with this law, just as I follow all the rules. Someday, though, the only “contractors” most people may be able to afford will be the tailgate slammers.

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Don’t Forget the Fresh Air

I’ve troubleshot many homes with ice dams and had success with the same strategies Steve Kuhl employs (“Making a Business of Ice Dams,” 1/11). As the article notes, many contractors approach ice dams by treating

the symptom rather than the underlying causes, and may end up doing more harm than good. One extra precaution to take when sealing up an attic as part of ice-dam remediation is to verify there is adequate fresh air entering the house for the occupants and heating equipment. It’s possible to tighten up an old house to the point where the remaining leaks don’t supply enough fresh air, resulting in poor indoor air quality and backdrafting of heating equipment exhaust. I’ve begun following the protocols called for by the Building Performance Institute for measuring ventilation rate and building depressurization under worst-case conditions. Sometimes we need to add mechanical ventilation as part of ice-dam work.

Mike Guertin

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Code-Compliant Winders

The question on the issue of winder treads (Q&A, 12/10) relayed some of the common interpretations of the 2000, 2003, and 2006 IRCs. However, it is important to note that because of the lack of specifics in the code text there are many interpretations. In particular none of these codes identifies the location of the walkline where winder treads should be designed in proportion to the human stride, the determined riser height, and transition to flyers (rectangular treads) in the flight. Each of these model codes references a point “12 inches (305 mm) from the side where the treads are narrower.” The chance that the architect, contractor, stairbuilder, and building official all agree on the same point along the “side” from which to measure has proven slim. It’s further complicated by the stage of construction: Do you measure from the wall finish, the stringer, the baluster, the return nosing, or the handrail? Of course it is the building official’s interpretation that matters, but the code has not been specific enough to allow for consistent interpretation across jurisdictions.

These and other issues are the reason the Stairway Manufacturers’ Association has been publishing its *Visual Interpretations of the Stairbuilding Codes*. A small excerpt from the 2006 version was used in the *JLC* December issue. The entire document and other editions are readily accessible at stairways.org or by calling 877/500-5759; the 2009 version is now available.

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KEEP 'EM COMING!

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