Q Earlier this year there was a discussion on *JLC*'s website regarding the proper width for flashing tape that's used to seal around windows. Can you settle what is recommended and what is required?

A Mike Guertin, a builder and remodeler in East Greenwich, R.I., and a presenter at JLC Live, responds: The 2015 IRC does not list a specific minimum width for flashing tape, but it does give us some prescriptive guidance. Section R703.4 subsection 1, entitled "Exterior Window and Door Openings," says: "Flashing at exterior window and door openings shall extend to the surface of the exterior wall finish or to the water-resistive barrier complying with Section 703.2 for subsequent drainage."

This means simply that the flashing tape needs to extend from the window and onto the surface of the siding or onto the housewrap.

The same subsection goes on to note: "Flashing at exterior window and door openings shall be installed in accordance with one or more of the following: The fenestration manufacturer's installation and flashing instructions, or for applications not addressed in the fenestration manufacturer's instructions, in accordance with the flashing manufacturer's instructions."

In other words, follow the instructions that come with the window or with the flashing tape.

The subsection then states: "Where flashing instructions or details are not provided, pan flashing shall be installed at the sill of exterior window and door openings. Pan flashings shall be sealed or sloped in such a manner as to direct water to the surface of the exterior wall finish or to the water-resistive barrier for subsequent drainage. Openings using pan flashing shall incorporate flashing or protection at the head and sides."

This requires the bare minimum of sloped pan flashing with additional flashing properly installed at the sides and head of the opening.

The problem—and frustration—arises when you look for guidance from product manufacturers. I checked the instructions from several window manufacturers as well as instructions provided by housewrap makers and the makers of flashing tape to see if any specific dimensions were provided for a minimum flashing-tape width—and found none. The only common dimension I saw was for the upturned jamb legs of a sill pan (most manufacturers called for 6 inches).

But the biggest quandary for me was that many of the manufacturers' instructions tell installers to follow the local building code or the flashing-tape instructions. Then the flashing-tape instructions often refer back to the window manufacturer's instructions and the local building code, with the code leading you back to the window or flashing manufacturers in an endless circle of passing the buck.

My recommendation is to check all three sources: your local building code (in the event it is more stringent than the 2015 IRC); the window manufacturer's instructions; and the flashing-tape maker's instructions. Then follow the one that calls for the widest width flashing tape (if any dimensions are available at all).

The narrowest flashing-tape width that I'm aware of is 4 inches. Given that most window flanges are less than 2 inches wide, 4-inch tape is wide enough to meet the code requirement that the flashing extend to the surface of the housewrap.

For what it's worth, I use 4-inch flashing tape for the side flanges and 6-inch tape for head flanges when the housewrap is installed before the windows are installed (so-called Eastern install). When the windows are installed before the housewrap (Western install), I use 6-inch tape on all sides unless the instructions direct me otherwise.

Q Is there a proper sequence for painting room interiors? I always paint ceilings first, but after that, do you do walls before trim or vice versa? And why?

A Scott Burt, owner of TopCoat Finishes in Jericho, Vt., and a presenter at JLC Live, responds: I find it best to work in a "top down" approach, starting with two coats on the ceiling. From there I

apply the first coat on the walls and then apply two complete coats on the window and door casings as well as on any other trim besides the baseboard, such as crown or chair rail. Next, I apply a final coat on the walls and then I do the baseboard last.

Finishing the baseboard last allows you to protect it from spatter during wall rolling, and also results in the crispest lines when you are cutting back into walls.

To protect the baseboard, I use a 1½-inch-wide low-tack tape, such as 3M 2080 Delicate. I do not rely on the tape to establish the cut line, but instead use the tape to cover most of the top of the baseboard, leaving me the baseboard-to-wall line to cut to as I apply the wall paint.

Besides keeping the spatter mess to a minimum, this sequence also lets me cut in the tightest lines.

The line between the wall and the trim is usually established by a bead of caulk, and I always trust my eye to establish the cut line rather than trying to follow one of the exact "lines" that are present where the

caulk meets either the wall or the trim. Because those lines are never perfectly straight, following them would yield a cut line that is not straight. And by the same token, the straightest visual line most likely won't follow the exact center of the caulk because of irregularities in the wall or in the trim.

The true craft involved in cutting in is creating a line that is straightest to your eye. When you look directly at the edge of the casing from 3 feet away, neither the wall color nor the trim color should look proud—just crisp and straight. And never try to create a line by taping. A freehand, straight, tight, crisp line is best. My mantra for cutting in is: "The faster the cut, the straighter the line."

When I cut in, I generally leave no overlap on adjacent surfaces. Overlapping trim onto wall or wall onto trim is a bad idea because there are always differences in sheen and in color. These differences can create coverage issues as well as "flashing," where the luster of the paint changes in the

area that was overlapped. I try to make tight cuts on every round, establishing the straightest line.

Cutting in the wall to the ceiling is even more critical to do well because this line is the most visible. The drywall joint is never perfectly straight, so you can't just cut to the joint. But you want to avoid letting the wall line creep up onto the ceiling joint—our eyes find that in a hurry. It's best to hold the wall line down a hair.

When you are cutting the wall-to-ceiling line, also keep in mind that you are working from a ladder and looking at the wall-ceiling joint from eye level. The view from the floor is an entirely different perspective—and the most important one. So you should be sighting your line each time you step off the ladder.

When I cut the first coat of wall paint to the ceiling and trim, I try to cut it fast and get the line to what I consider to be 98% of the finished line. On the final coat, I bring the line home to 100%, straightening out any slight variations with the last cut.