

EIFS UPDATE ISSUE # I

Over the last few months the Texas Bureau for Lathing and Plastering has received calls from a number of architects requesting information on Portland Cement Stucco. While we welcome this renewed interest in traditional stucco these same architects are telling us they no longer plan to use EIFS on their projects. Designers say that they face resistance from owners on the use of EIFS because of concerns about moisture intrusion and mold or because of the lack of available insurance protection for the building. They also note that some applicators have limited access to liability insurance covering EIFS installations. In some cases the local building code standards have been changed to restrict the use of EIFS A few cities have even included stucco in these same restrictions. Given this kind of environment it's time we took a closer look at these issues.

MOISTURE INTRUSION

The problem of moisture intrusion with EIFS clad walls is well documented. The vast Majority of buildings involved were single family houses constructed with wood framing. These houses had barrier type EIFS applied over wood substrates. These problems prompted individual and class action lawsuits against the manufacturers of these systems. Although less publicized, There were also similar suits against the major manufacturers of hardboard siding that involved hundreds of thousands of houses. EIFS is not alone when it comes to moisture intrusion problems.

The causes of these problems are the lack of or the improper installation of flashings at roofs, wall openings and attached decks. Improper sealants around windows, doors and other wall penetration were another problem. Poor installation practices by the contractor are also to blame in many cases. As a result of these problems the National Association of Home Builders [NAHB] announced through a press release in 2001 that an installer's guide on moisture protection of wood sheathing was available. In this press release it states "Exterior claddings including brick, stucco, vinyl siding and exterior insulation finish systems [EIFS] all have the same potential for sheathing and stud damage if weather barriers, flashings, and openings protections are not used or installed incorrectly." This information can be found on the NAHB web site, www.nahbc.org. The TEXAS Association of BUILDERS, through their Buildings Standards Task Force, introduced legislation that included "Recommendations for Prevention of Water Intrusion and Mold infestation in Residential Construction." These recommendations are part of 1-1B730 that has been signed into law.

What is being done to remedy this situation? First, the codes have recognized the problems and have changed the criteria for moisture protection. ICBO published their AC24 Criteria that requires a weather barrier behind the EIFS cladding and further requires that EIFS have a means of drainage to remove incidental moisture intrusion. This affects Type V, Group R, Division I and 3 Construction and the change became effective in November of 1999.

Second, the manufacturers of EIFS have developed a variety of improved systems with drainage, weather barriers and flashings to prevent moisture intrusion. The standard EIFS systems can be used for Types I through IV construction.

Third, the manufacturers have implemented more rigorous and more frequent applicator training programs to insure proper installation of their systems.

Conclusion: EIFS problems were limited to wood frame construction. EIFS applications on non residential structures, many over 30 years old are performing well. EIFS is still the best value and most versatile wall cladding for current and future building projects.

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