

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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## Human Faces

### A Grassroots Grapple with the Code by Brigit Frank

What do you do if you're faced with a problem? Well, if you're a computer programmer you write a program to help you solve it. That's how Bob Becht, President of Chamber Truss, 1999-2001 President of the South Florida Truss and Manufacturers Association, and WTCA board member, approached the potential issues that his company faced in light of the new Florida State Building Code. First, Bob had to learn what the provisions of the building code were before he could put it into his program.

The Florida State Building Code 2001 is unique. It is a new statewide building code that supersedes all other prior codes in Florida. Amending the code is difficult because it was passed by the Florida State Legislature, making it much more complex to change because of the politics involved as well as the time and effort that were invested in creating the code in the first place.

One section of the new code, the High Velocity Hurricane Zones (HVHZ), applies only to Dade and Broward counties. However, they are extremely large counties and have the potential to impact a number of component manufacturers. The HVHZ section specifies the requirements for building in hurricane zones where top wind speeds can be as high as 150 miles per hour. (By contrast, the top wind speed in Wisconsin is 90 mile per hour.)

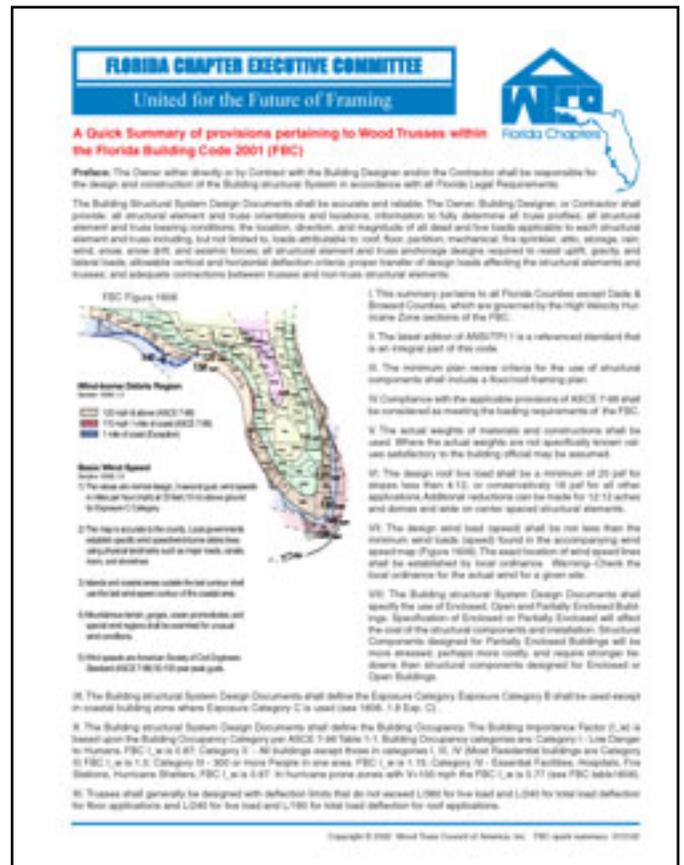
The HVHZ section, in addition to an entirely new building code, is a great deal for component manufacturers in Florida to absorb. The Florida State Building Code 2001 applies to every aspect of construction, not just building components, so simply finding the information in the code that pertains to trusses or structural building components is an ordeal. In addition, several areas of the code are ambiguous and open to interpretation by building departments, inspectors and county officials.

Realizing that there is little immediate chance of the code changing, Bob, a computer programmer who maintains code compliance for his company, immediately began working on an intermediate computer program to implement the new code into his company's design process. Bob began by getting a copy of the code on disk and searching the document for references to the use of trusses. He was then able to add a series of questions to his company's program to ensure that their component designs were complying with every aspect of the new code.

Bob's work on his company's program was the basis for him to write a commentary on the code. His goal was, "to interpret the code as it relates to wood trusses and to give guidance." He enlisted the support of WTCA to work through the issues

related to his commentary. This led to the development of two documents, "A Quick Summary of provisions pertaining to Wood Trusses within the Florida Building Code 2001 (FBC)," and the more comprehensive "Summary of provisions pertaining to Wood Trusses within the Florida Building Code 2001 (FBC)."

WTCA also shared this work with industry technical committees to ensure that nothing had been overlooked. Great comments were received, in particular from the staff at Robbins, MiTek and Alpine, as well as Joe Lawson (The Truss Office, Boynton Beach), Mike Ruede (Trussway, Orlando) and John Herring (A-1 Roof Trusses, Boynton Beach) This team approach made the concept that Bob envisioned develop into a comprehensive and credible finished product. At the recent South Florida Chapter meeting, Bob shared the finished product, which was very well received. He has also added the information to the chapter's web site, [www.sfwtpca.com](http://www.sfwtpca.com).



This has not been a quick fix for Bob, he estimates that, "Since the beginning of December [2001] I have spent a third of my time on this," Bob commented. "It's been educational though. I'm learning a lot about engineering and the law, and how the two fit together."

Despite the time pressures of running his own business and being a WTCA Board and chapter member, Bob is continuing his work with the code. Currently, he is gathering wind speed maps from every building department in Florida (the code requires that every building department have its own map) to add to the summary documents and post on the chapter's web site. He hopes that this will help component manufacturers and building officials in Florida understand how the Florida Building Code 2001 impacts the component industry.

Finally, Bob mentioned that, "Most important of all is that this has truly been a project that exemplifies the importance of being involved with WTCA and its chapters. WTCA staff provides a great support system to take concepts like this at the grassroots (chapter) level, and assist in turning them into reality. WTCA's committee network also affords the opportunity to obtain a broad-based review of work being done, so that best possible and most accurate finished product is created. We really used the skills of the entire team to its fullest. This is just the beginning of the kind of work this team is going to do in Florida. It has already made a positive impact on our market and on my company."

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