

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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Frequently Asked Questions

Design Responsibilities by Rachel Smith

Like it or not, manufacturers in this industry are becoming well versed in the art of covering their assets. It's unfortunate that the days of handshake deals are a thing of the past, but if you aren't prepared to protect your interests, those you do business with on a daily basis certainly are not prepared to do it for you. You may be best buddies with your customers, but when things start going south it's every man for himself.

One area that is in constant need of clarification is design responsibilities. This is a term that you may have heard at one point or another but may not have thought about how it affects your day-to-day operations. The following question illustrates how design responsibilities need to be understood by your customers at the front end to avoid problems and misunderstandings.

QUESTION:

My company supplied roof trusses for a hotel project. The building inspector shut the project down because the trusses were not designed to account for additional snowdrift loading. The construction plans did not contain any snowdrift loading information. The architect is claiming it is our responsibility to determine drift loading, therefore we must fix the problem. Do you have any documentation to help us dispute the architect's claim?

ANSWER:

Yes, Standard Design Responsibilities in the Design Process WTCA 1-1995 was developed to avoid situations just like this. This document outlines what is expected from the five parties involved in the design process—building owner, building designer, contractor, truss manufacturer and truss designer. This document is helpful in clearing up expensive misunderstandings like this one and could very well be included in your customer contracts.

In your case, the building designer may not be persuaded by this information after the fact. That is why it is smart to include this document with every bid/proposal/purchase order you submit so that your scope of work is well defined from the outset. For example, Section 3.2.5 states that one of the building designer's responsibilities is to provide "The location, direction and magnitude of all dead and live loads attributable to: roof, floor, partition, mechanical, fire sprinkler, attic, storage, wind, snow drift and seismic."

At this point, WTCA 1-1995 is completely voluntary and is not enforced by any agency or building code. By the end of the year, however, TPI should have a new standard in place called ANSI/WTCA/TPI 4-2000 that is based directly on WTCA 1-1995. The fact that it will become an ANSI

document does not make it enforceable but it gives the document more credibility and clout for having passed through the public consensus process. When you combine this with ensuring that all the language in the specifications and/or contracts/purchase order complies with WTCA 1-1995, you have provided a foundation that will keep you from assuming more responsibility than is yours to take. And if you desire to take on this “extra” work, you can more easily justify getting paid “extra” for it.

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