

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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President's Message



Expectations from Our Suppliers by Scott Arquilla, 2003 WTCA President

What do we all expect from our suppliers? The answer is simple: a quality product sold at a fair price delivered when it is needed. However, as we all know in today's business environment, that simple solution is sometimes easier said than done.

The single largest supplier to the structural building components industry is the lumber industry, whether they are the actual producer, wholesalers or brokers. The wood truss segment of this industry purchases over seven billion board feet of lumber annually. Have you ever thought how much lumber that is? How about a single line of truckloads stretched about 3,800 miles! That's close to the distance from New York City to Los Angeles and onto Portland, OR!

Mold on lumber has recently grown into a hot topic of discussion between our customers, our suppliers and us. A year ago, I heard complaints that a couple of our Chicago Chapter members were having trusses and wall panels refused at delivery or had to replace them after delivery due to the appearance of mold. This, in addition to similar occurrences in Florida, caused us to act as quickly as we could to put together a new brochure in the Truss Technology in Building series: Facts Regarding Mold on Lumber. Our chapter sent this TTB along with a letter to each member of the Home Builders Association of Greater Chicago explaining our position regarding mold. This effort has seemed to help as there have been fewer customer complaints regarding the presence of mold on lumber. The heightened concern over mold in our operations has probably helped as well, given that there is more recognition and resolution of any mold problems prior to the trusses being manufactured.

Has the issue gone away? Of course, it hasn't. But we have the tools to provide the facts to our customers. Clearly, the mold problem begins where there is moisture and food and, in our product's case, that means wet lumber. Today, this is a surprising problem to most of us in this industry, as there has always been mold on lumber when the moisture content was in excess of 19 percent. We also know that once the moisture source goes away, the lumber will dry out, mold growth will cease, the spores become dormant and all that is left is a stain and dust. Until the nationally publicized mold litigation, who ever thought mold on lumber would be a problem in construction?

In August 2002, Dwight, Joe and Linda Hikel (Shelter Systems), John Herring (A-1 Roof Trusses), Tim Rouch (Gang-Nail Truss), Kent Pagel (WTCA Legal Counsel), and WTCA staff attended the NAHB's Mold Summit. Many other industry leaders and supplier organizations were also present. At the summit, we learned that homebuilders expect us to supply material that is completely

mold free due to the litigation we have all read about. In order for component manufacturers to accomplish this, we would have to perform each of the following: inspect all lumber when it arrives at our plant, keep it under cover prior to use, manufacture under cover, cover the product after it is assembled, cover the finished product through delivery, and ensure that it is covered on the jobsite until it is under sheathing as part of the roof structure.

The alternative to the complete, door-to-door product coverage is requesting our suppliers to provide material that is always dried to 19 percent or less and/or treated with some type of a "moldicide" to remain mold free through our entire processing and delivery cycle. At the meeting, some builders noted they are willing to pay more for that treated product especially if it ensures mold on lumber will not be an issue at and after delivery. Of course, there are also customers that expect us to provide that superior product at no extra cost. Our suppliers and we need to recognize there is a real problem with this and come up with a variety of solutions at the various costs that will allow us to work with our customers to solve this problem. We can't criticize each other's positions and we can't afford to point fingers and expect to solve the problem. Our customers are demanding a mold-free product and we have to develop intelligent business solutions to satisfy them.

Our industry has worked hard to educate both our suppliers and our customers on the issues that are important to us as component manufacturers. We have spoken the facts, as we know them, on all matters that affect us economically, legally and legislatively. We need all of our suppliers to be engaged with us each and every day, so that we understand each other's business well enough to affect change in our collective business' economics, risks and markets. Common sense suggests that if our suppliers really understand our businesses and help us deal with the challenges that we face in growing our business, they stand to gain as much from that assistance as we do. There is no downside to us or our suppliers. The same can be said of the suppliers that help our association tackle important industry issues and challenges. If we do this together and the industry overall benefits, all who are part of our industry benefit as well.

I will continue to challenge all our suppliers who have a passion for our industry to join with us in the efforts of our individual companies and in our industry programs. We promote structural building components each and every day. We sell to the end users, whether they are homebuilders, framers or homeowners. By knowing the constraints in our markets, we understand and are able to best serve their needs. By working together to meet those specific needs and challenges as individual companies and collectively through our association, we will all be better off.

At the October 19, 2002 Board Meeting in Columbus, OH, Finnforest USA presented a \$5,000 donation to the WTCA Marketing Committee to continue its goal of expanding our market through activities like Truss Knowledge Online (TKO) and the Truss Technology in Building series. This is a significant investment in our association's work by a primary wood products manufacturer. Finnforest USA believes structural building components are the future of framing and that their monetary contribution in our efforts will return an amount far in excess of the dollar amount given. They wish to support and work closely with our association in order to assure both their future and ours. Beyond being a very supportive member, Finnforest USA is also a SBC Magazine Gold Advertiser and a BCMC exhibitor. This example of supplier support was completely unexpected; it tells us the value they place on the work we are doing and the

potential we have in the future to make a difference on behalf of our industry for our suppliers as well as us. It also challenges us to continue to provide significant industry-wide value.

As good businesspeople, we want our suppliers to satisfy our needs and those of our customers. Our futures will depend upon our collective, continued investment of both time and money in our industry. After all, we want to work with suppliers who help us make sure that the products we supply are of the quality expected delivered at a fair price when our customers need them.

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