

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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"ToolBase Services" Ask an Expert: Access to Building & Construction Experts at Your Fingertips by Shelton Cartwright

When builders, homeowners and other building industry professionals have questions about new building technologies and practices, ToolBase Services provide unbiased, expert advice.

When it comes to learning about new technologies, we all need accurate information. Finding an unbiased, third-party professional who understands housing technology and has the time to answer your questions free of charge is even more helpful in making usage and purchasing decisions.

Since 1996, the ToolBase Services program, operated by the NAHB Research Center, has provided objective web-based information on new housing technologies and practices through its Ask An Expert service. The ToolBase Services program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and several other industry organizations, including the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), the Steel Framing Alliance and the Wood Truss Council of America (WTCA).

TOOLBASE'S ASK AN EXPERT SERVICE FOR THE RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION MARKET

The primary audience for ToolBase's Ask an Expert service is builders and other home building industry professionals. However, homeowners have also sent in many questions. During the first six months of 2004, 24 percent of the questions to the Ask an Expert service originated from builders, with 40 percent from other industry professionals, and 36 percent from homeowners.

Most of the inquiries from builders, other industry professionals and homeowners have been focused on new construction techniques and products. However, builders have shown a specific interest in quality programs and alternative structural systems, while industry professionals have asked for statistics and information on codes and standards, and homeowners have asked about energy efficiency and remodeling.

In addition to their focus on quality assurance programs, homebuilders have asked questions relating to products, design, construction and management. Specifically, 66 percent of the builders who have asked questions concerning alternative structural systems were looking for design or construction information, while 26 percent were seeking information about available products. Inquiries relating to building components address both wood and steel framing systems.

Builders and others who may have an Ask an Expert question, should visit the ToolBase Services web site at www.toolbase.org/ask and complete the online form. In most cases, questions are

answered by the close of the next business day.

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