

Adventures in Advocacy

Legislative Advocacy Is Just a Click Away by Sean. D. Shields

Okay, here's a quick quiz for you:

1. If you're unsure what the word "didactic" means when you read it on the pages of SBC Magazine, do you reach for your dusty copy of Webster's Dictionary, or do you go to www.dictionary.com?
2. If you want to find out if that pain and swelling in your wrist is a possible fracture, do you go immediately to the doctor, or do you consult www.webmd.com first?
3. If you want to contact your local lawmaker or Congressperson about possibly beneficial tort reform with regard to construction industry liability, do you call information for the number, or will you go to the new SBC Legislative web site, www.sbcleg.com?

While your answers to the first two questions gives some indication on the degree to which you utilize the World Wide Web as an informational tool, my hope is that every single one of you answered "yes" to the last question (or, at least will by the time you finish reading this article). As part of an intensive effort to capitalize on the strengths of the structural building components industry, SBC Legislative staff has created this web site to not only provide valuable information to you about legislative and regulatory events affecting your business, it also presents a face of the industry to lawmakers and bureaucrats.

Now, before you clamor to your computer, open your Internet browser and go right to this site, I'd like to present a brief summary of what you will find. On the main page, you will see the latest breaking news facing the industry. In many cases, you may receive some of this information as a Legislative Notice via email, but on the web site you will have the opportunity to get more in-depth background information, additional possible impacts to your bottom line and, if you're curious for even more, historical information on the topic.

The SBC Legislative web site, www.sbcleg.com, is intended to be a clearinghouse of information and analysis to ensure you remain abreast on decisions by lawmakers and regulators that affect the way you do business. In the event, a decision is looming that you feel is either very good or very bad for your operations, the SBC Legislative web site will also offer, in conjunction with a Legislative Action! sent to you via email, a quick and easy strategy for you to follow in contacting the appropriate people. Not only will you be able to get suggestions on what to say and how to say it, you will also have the ability to look up your lawmakers.

Sometimes, however, just having a phone number or email for your Congressperson is not enough. Fortunately, this web site will also allow you to find out what committees they serve on, who their key legislative staff members are and even their voting record on similar issues. Suddenly, within five minutes, along with a few mouse clicks, you may find yourself acting as an effective advocate for the best decision that will benefit your company's future. If that isn't empowerment, I don't know what is!

If you find that you get the advocacy itch, and just need an outlet to scratch, the SBC Legislative web site will also offer the opportunity to register online for the Legislative Conference, May 4-6, 2005, in Washington, D.C. The Conference will give you the chance to follow up on your emails and calls and visit with your Congressperson face-to-face. Not only will you be able to meet your lawmakers, but you'll also be invited to meet with agency regulators and affiliated trade association leaders. In amongst the many high-profile meetings, you may even find yourself on a private tour of the U.S. Capitol or White House, or just strolling down the Mall, viewing the many historic monuments.

I am almost certain, if you've read this far, you are at least intrigued by the idea of advocating to lawmakers and regulators on behalf of the structural building components industry. Let me set the hook by pointing out that no one can make or break your business faster than these few elected and appointed government officials. The laws they pass and enforce create the environment within which you must operate. Just think about how much money you spend on documenting every aspect of your business from taxes to employment to insurance—it's all driven by the decisions made by people like this. That is why, when these few individuals are pondering a decision affecting this industry, it is in your best interest to share your point of view and have a direct effect on the outcome of that decision.

Finally, the SBC Legislative web site offers you the ability to get the latest statistics on the industry, industry positions on various national policies, and helpful suggestions on how to schedule individual meetings with your national lawmakers when they are in their home district offices (look for more information on these meetings in next month's Adventures in Advocacy article). So, please, check it out today.

Questions or article topics can be sent to sshields@sbcmag.info.

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