

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

March 2005

Builder Banter

CONSTRUCTION TOPS WORK FATALITIES

A total of 5,539 fatal work injuries were recorded in the U.S in 2003, with the largest number of fatal work injuries in 2003 coming from the construction sector. More than 20 percent of the total fatalities were attributed to workers in the residential and commercial construction trades. [Source: Frame Building News, November 2004, p. 17]

RESEARCH AIMS TO IMPROVE HEALTH, SAFETY OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

In 1990, accidents were responsible for six to seven percent of the world's mortality rate. In industry, the highest injury rate occurs in the construction sector, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) hopes to reverse this trend, awarding Virginia Tech \$3.4 million to investigate ways to help reduce work-related accidents, injuries and fatalities in the small construction industry. Falls from buildings, scaffolds and ladders are the leading cause of fatal injury in the construction industry. Each year some 38,000 construction injuries are reported, with 21,000 involving days away from work, according to the DOL.

The researchers are interested in developing the most advantageous work system designs. In the construction industry, this might address how individual jobs should be designed to improve the entire work system. This improvement includes technical, social and organizational issues that affect the workers. Technology must be designed to be compatible with human capabilities and limitations. This approach can help improve overall productivity, quality, health, safety and job satisfaction. [Source: Toolbase E-News, November 2004]

SAFETY EQUIPMENT USE ON THE RISE IN CONSTRUCTION

A new survey of construction safety professionals in the private and public sector found that safety equipment use and awareness continue to rise. The study, from the International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA), indicated that workers increased their use in several types of personal protective equipment, including hard hats, safety shoes/boots and hearing protection. [Source: Occupational Hazards, November 2004, p.14]

BUILDING MATERIAL PRICES TO FALL

Builders can expect some relief from climbing building materials prices this year. Cement is expected to peak early in 2005 as Florida's post-hurricane reconstruction efforts move into full swing, according to the National Association of Home Builders' Construction Forecast Conference. At the peak of a typical commodity price cycle, experts believe that the prices are topping out and should be moving downward over the next several months. In addition, further price declines are expected in 2006 and 2007. [Source: Rural Builder, December 2004, p. 8]

HOME BUILDERS EXPRESS SOLID OUTLOOK FOR HOUSING MARKET

Home builders continue to sound an overall positive note regarding the ongoing strength of the market for newly built single-family homes in February, according to the National Association of Home Builders/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index (HMI). Though unusually wet weather conditions across much of the country helped push the index down two points in February, builder expectations for the next six months held steady from the beginning of the year.

"On the whole, builders are still expressing very positive views of conditions in the housing market. Mortgage interest rates have actually improved since January, and builder confidence as measured by the HMI is ahead of where it was this time last year," said NAHB President Dave Wilson, a custom home builder from Ketchum, ID.

"The main concern builders are citing right now pertains to availability and pricing of lots for development—which itself is a symptom of strong buyer demand," agreed NAHB Chief Economist David Seiders. "Demand, in turn, continues to be driven by solid job and income growth, low mortgage rates and the investment aspects of homeownership."

The NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index is derived from a monthly survey of builders that NAHB has been conducting for nearly 20 years. [Source: NAHB Press Release, 2/15/05, www.nahb.org]

TOP TEN CRITICAL ISSUES FOR BUILDERS

1. Liability insurance cost
2. Liability insurance availability
3. Lumber price and supply
4. Development approval process
5. Development costs
6. Impact fees/development exaction
7. Cost of lots
8. Availability of lots
9. Growth/no growth attitudes
10. Workers' compensation

(Collected from the results of an ongoing survey by the National Association of Home Builders.) [Source: Luxury Home Builder, November 2004, p. 9]

SURVEY FINDS BUILDERS NEED TO STEP UP MARKETING OF GREEN MATERIALS

By taking a more aggressive marketing approach, homebuilders and contractors have a huge opportunity to tap a growing and potentially profitable market for green and energy-efficient materials and products, according to a recent survey conducted by the NAHB Research Center. The survey was conducted among consumers expecting to buy a new home or to spend more than \$10,000 on renovations in the coming year. Nearly half of respondents said that they were eager to incorporate green products into their homes, especially if they save money. But only 14 percent said that their builder or contractor had told them of green or energy-efficient options and provided information about their benefits and cost advantages. Among those who did not plan to invest in green products, over half said it was because they were not aware of available options and 23 percent said it was because their builder or contractor did not tell them about these options. The survey indicated that builders could enhance their business by providing green products. In choosing a builder, 55 percent of respondents said that offering energy-efficient windows and doors would be a plus; 52 percent would be swayed by those offering energy-saving appliances, and 51 percent would give a preference to those offering insulation that delivered significant energy cost savings over conventional insulation. [Source: Toolbase E-News, November 2004]

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