

Letters

Safety in the Real World

I cannot tell you how much I appreciated the stories in the August issue of *JLC* about safety slip-ups. Every spring I teach a class of 85 undergraduates; they visit three construction sites over the course of the term and also work in our shop, doing welding, cutting, and so forth. In spite of visits to job sites and lots of safety orientation, it takes a while for some students to really grasp that we are taking them into territory where something can go very wrong very easily. Your safety stories are vivid proof of exactly the things I worry about, and they will be required reading come January.

Dana Buntrock

Associate Professor
Department of Architecture
University of California, Berkeley

Not All Safety Equipment Is Safe

I appreciated the article “Safety Lessons” in the August issue. I passed it around here to remind people that complacency can get you hurt.

One thing I'd like to see is a frank discussion of “safety” equipment that in application is unsafe. A case in point is my table saw. We set it up out of the box per the manufacturer's instructions, made a few cuts, and immediately removed the blade guards and feather boards. The things were cheap and unreliable — the stock would frequently get stuck in them, leaving you with no choice but to hang on to the wood while reaching for the shutoff. We've since upgraded the fence and installed some nice magnetic feather boards, and feel we have a safe, solid saw now.

It seems like a lot of manufacturers are adding “safety” features to their products. Some are great and need to be complimented and some are just plain

ridiculous and need to be called out. Walk around any job site and you'll see lots of gear that has had the guards or shields removed. We don't do it because we don't care about safety; we do it because the equipment is subpar, or just plain dangerous.

William D. Neil
Aurora, Colo.

Pandering Charge

Sorry, but I'm not willing to buy into your periodic articles such as “¿Habla Español?” (8/05) or any other method that encourages the steady influx of illegal immigrants. Their takeover of our once-fine industry is already sufficiently insidious without such incredibly short-sighted pandering.

Robert O. Beauchamp
Eugene, Ore.

Reader Feedback on the New Look

I appreciate your magazine. I've read it for many years and have come to rely on it a lot. And I really like the new cover design. However, I have one complaint: I don't like the waxy front and back cover. Generally I drive around with this thing in my truck, and it has a tendency to slide all over the place.

Kelley F. Phillips
Mulligan & Phillips Construction
Doraville, Ga.

The Fine Print

I just received my July copy of *JLC*. It appears that the magazine is now completely inundated with slick ads. I realize that your advertisers pay their fair share, but I would rather see a scaled-back volume of ads and more info for the guy who gets his hands dirty. In years gone by, you were oriented to the working man; now you seem to be focused on the designers and other folks who work in the clean zone.

One more thing. I have been in the trades for 30

KEEP 'EM COMING!

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years and my eyes are not what they used to be. Your type size is not as large as it was before.

Jim Carr

General Contractor
Volcano, Calif.

Flashing Flanged Windows

I thoroughly enjoyed the article “Flashing a Flanged Window” (6/05). I wish, for the sake of homeowners, that all builders would read, study, and follow Carl Hagstrom’s instructions to the letter. Traveling around the state of Vermont as much as I do in my work, as well as curiously looking at any house under construction, it always amazes me to find that some builders still X-cut the housewrap, wrap the upper flap over the window headers, then install the head flashing over the housewrap. This is akin to double jeopardy.

Henri de Marne

Waitsfield, Vt.

Builders Can Set Example

I’d like to respond to NAHB president David F. Wilson’s letter in the July 2005 issue regarding the costs and payback of proposed changes to the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC).

The proposed IECC changes require a higher level of performance but do not limit builders to specific ways of achieving that performance. A variety of mechanisms are available for achieving the better performance, which, if properly executed, would improve the comfort of a house and reduce its operating costs. That the DOE is backing away from the proposed changes seems driven more by politics than good science or good economics. (But hey, why should this issue be any different from countless others? Regardless of the party affil-

iation of the administration in power, I hasten to add.)

An analysis done by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy calculates that the 30-year savings generated by the proposed IECC changes will save homeowners \$7 billion in energy costs (something like 500 trillion Btu overall) and millions of tons of carbon emissions.

“We should be working to achieve higher energy performance standards, not advocating against them.”

The current energy performance of our homes lags far behind what we’re easily (and economically) capable of producing with the right training and the right motivation. Houses are unlike other purchases whose energy performance is monitored and regulated — such as cars and appliances — in that their useful life is measured in decades rather than years. We as builders and remodelers therefore have a unique responsibility to future generations.

It seems to me we all should be working to achieve higher performance standards rather than advocating against them.

Paul Eldrenkamp

Byggmeister Inc.
Newton, Mass.

Vinyl-Siding Training

As a 16-year veteran of the siding industry and as a product designer and vinyl-

siding application specialist, I am constantly amazed by the lack of experience that “experienced” vinyl-siding installers have today. During my inspections of installed product, I repeatedly meet 10-, 15-, and 20-year veterans who don’t follow even the most basic installation requirements. A big part of the problem comes from years of incompletely trained people passing on fewer and fewer of the proper methods to the next generation of siders. As my father would say, “Is it 20 years’ experience, or one year’s experience 20 times?”

With most vinyl claims being installation-related, I am happy to see the Vinyl Siding Institute’s certified installation program starting up. It’s been a long time in development and is certainly needed in the industry. The program stands to create a database of truly qualified installers. Everyone benefits: The manufacturer has fewer claims to review, the builder gets better installations, and the installer gets more business. Programs like this need to be supported.

Rick Lappin

Louisiana-Pacific Corp.

Wallpaper Liner Works Well

With regard to repairing drywall after wallpaper removal and preparing walls for wall covering (Q&A, 8/05), I’ve had excellent results on many projects refurbishing and preparing walls using wallpaper liner. It’s a fibrous material, thicker than wallpaper, and is applied with wallpaper paste. It stretches tight when it dries, spanning cracks, crevices, and cavities. Anything that sticks out, obviously, must first be hammered down or scraped off, but concave imperfections disappear under the liner.

I once remodeled a house built in 1915. The plaster walls were extensively

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cracked and crazed. Hanging wallpaper liner resulted in perfectly smooth walls, which I painted with quality latex paint. The thick paint filled the liner's butt seams, which did not show. I lived there for five years, and though the plaster continued to craze under the liner (I could hear occasional cracking), the walls stayed perfectly smooth. When wallpaper is installed over the liner, the wallpaper does not tear apart if the plaster cracks underneath.

Though I've not tried such applications myself, the manufacturer claims that the liner will stretch across gaps as wide as cement-block mortar joints and

the grooves of veneer paneling, providing a smooth wall for papering.

Michael LeButt
Cheboygan, Mich.

Fire Sprinklers Add Cost

This may be beyond the scope of your publication, but I would like to see some impartial documentation supporting the cost-effectiveness of residential fire sprinklers (*In the News*, 5/05). I don't consider the simple assertion by a spokesman for the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition that sprinklers "save lives" convincing evidence.

Smoke alarms would seem to have great benefits in comparison to cost; fire sprinklers would seem to have great cost in comparison to benefits. It's not only the initial installation cost, but also the continuing monthly cost for an oversized water meter for the life of the home, that is the issue.

How about comparing sprinklers with other fire-resistant construction options? Aren't sprinklers just another way to make housing less affordable while generating business activity for the members of the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition?

Ed Lester
Lafayette, Calif.