

Special inspection

Third-party inspections for building envelopes

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The use of private inspections in lieu of municipal building inspections is a growing trend throughout the country. In areas where a project's size, complexity and pace of construction are combined with many similar projects, building officials simply don't have the manpower to keep up or conduct a thorough evaluation.

For several states, outsourcing inspection services to known professionals who have the necessary expertise provides the necessary approvals to continue with additional work and can save money in the process.

California, Nevada and Washington, and cities such as New York City, government officials have created a mandate by code or law the use of third party special inspectors to ease the strain of projects being delayed and to keep projects moving. California and New York City, for example, are based upon the new International Building Code, while codes or laws in other states, such as Florida, allow building officials to require or developers request the use of special inspectors.

In these areas, developers have the power to utilize third party inspectors to save time, and as a result, reduce costs because some completed work must be inspected and approved before additional work can begin. As a result, third party inspectors can be available as required to serve the developers' needs.

To provide examples, Washington, in response to growing concern about construction defect issues with building envelopes, mandated that developers of multifamily residential buildings have independent, objective inspections to identify construction faults, so they can be corrected before they become major problems. Nevada has had very strict requirements for special inspection including agency registration, inspector certification, inspection and reporting requirements. Recently they have expanded the special inspection requirements for cladding systems on high-rise buildings.

Florida legislation has long allowed building officials to mandate third party "special inspections" as a condition of a permit for cladding components and as a condition to receive a certificate of occupancy. In New York City, effective July 2008, "controlled inspection," as defined in the 1968 building code, was replaced with special inspection requirements for a variety of construction elements including wall panels, curtain walls, veneers, exterior insulation finish systems and fire-stop systems.

The nature and extent of the inspections as required by code varies by region.

Simply put, the trend and need for special inspections by private companies will continue to grow. So, how does a developer, architect or contractor find the right inspector? The special inspection codes typically allow the developer to select a special inspection agency and present it to the local building official for approval. More and more jurisdictions keep lists of pre-approved/certified special inspection firms or individuals.

While glazing contractors cannot make the decisions on special inspectors, they often have a say. Smart developers will listen to the recommendations of their subcontractor. They recognize that neither the grief of a "generic" inexperienced inspection company or the nightmare of a "super-ego" consultant is good for their project. Since cooperation and communication are all too often the secret of a successful project, having a knowledgeable, experienced and practical inspector goes a long way in avoiding unnecessary delays and expenses.

To develop a good working relationship with the special inspector, a glazing contractor needs to be open and honest. If you have a problem with a field condition, advise the inspector first instead of hoping that he will not find it. If he advises you of a deficiency, either correct it immediately, if possible, or give him an accurate estimate of when the corrective work will be completed. While it might be an obvious thought, do not cover up incomplete or defective work. Once an inspector loses trust or respect for the glazing subcontractor things get difficult for everyone.



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