

Consultants Corner

Going the CWCT Way

Learning from Our European Counterparts

by Mark Baker

On October 11, 2001, I attended the annual general meeting of the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology (CWCT) in London. CWCT is a group based in Bath, England, which was formed in 1989 in response to growing technical problems being experienced with cladding in the United Kingdom (UK). Its main activities include research, education, training and publication. The strength of the centre lies in the fact that the membership is balanced between developers, architects, engineers, consultants, general and subcontractors, material suppliers and other research and testing organizations.

I thought I might share with you some of the information reported at the meeting that I found interesting.

Failures

Failures in cladding systems and components are still very common. Failure usually involves water infiltration; however, it also includes component separation, glass breakage and structural failure.

The group acknowledged that it was not possible to measure the performance of the cladding industry against the past to determine if failure rates were increasing. However, it was the general consensus that failures were not any less common than ten years ago. Part of the reason for this is that the construction industry as a whole tends to not share information on failures. As a result, data is difficult to compile and lessons learned from failures are not disseminated.

It was the opinion of attendees that a majority of the failures could be attributed to installation/workmanship errors, although deficient design/detailing was also thought to contribute to the problems.

In an attempt to decrease the amount of failures, the centre is now focusing on education and training. CWCT believes that a majority of the problems could be prevented if the industry was more aware of past failures.

Safety Improvements

In addition to seminars, workshops and training courses in various cladding subjects that are generally targeted toward architects and consultants, the centre is participating with the UK general contractors in a program to improve the safety and quality of its workforce. The CWCT is providing an installer training program in which glazing subcontractors send their staffs for training and registration.

The program consists of two courses. Part one is a three-day training course that covers site safety and basic window installation techniques and principals. Part two is a two-day course that covers curtainwall installation and is product-specific.

Participants will be issued registration cards bearing the photograph of the cardholder as well as a listing of training completed.

The goal of the program is to have 40 percent of site staff trained and registered by December 2001, 80 percent registered by December 2002 and 100 percent registered by December 2003.

The centre estimates that almost 500 of the approximately 5,000 glazing installers nationwide have been issued with CWCT installer cards.

Although the CWCT installer training scheme would not be a viable program for the United States, you have to admire the attempt being made by the UK construction industry as a whole and the glazing industry in particular to address the long-term problem of unskilled, untrained workers.



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