

On Code Violations

Reading “Common Code Violations” (*PDB*, January/February 2008) reminded me just how much code interpretations can vary. As a building inspector, I don’t completely disagree with the article, but I do have a number of comments to add.

The article states that IRC section R319 requires that “all structural elements exposed to weathering be protected against decay.” Yet section R319.1.3 “Geographical areas” twice specifies “when local experience has shown a need.” Therefore, this isn’t a requirement unless a local jurisdiction determines it is.

It’s also stated that if a deck is built with standard-grade lumber, cut ends must be preservative treated and the remainder painted, per R319.1.1. However, the IRC gives no method of correcting untreated material. On the contrary, there’s a section specifying the quality, inspection, and testing of treated material, and a definition of “naturally durable wood.” Painting would be an alternative that is subject to local approval.

The code requirements for fasteners (R319.3) do not apply to framing anchors, which need to be approved when they’re used (R502.6.2). It’s up to the building official to approve them; many base approval on manufacturer recommendations.

While it’s true that the IRC specifies only 2-by material in multiple plies for headers and girders, an inspector may allow 4x4s and 6x6s. The section “Alternative materials, design and methods of construction and equipment” allows a building official to approve construction that meets the intent of the code. The NDS (National Design

Specification) contains section properties for solid sawn lumber, including 4x4s and 6x6s. Therefore, structural capacities can be determined for solid sawn lumber, allowing them to be calculated in a design.

A 24-inch-maximum cantilever is suggested in the article, unless engineered. Note that IRC Table R502.3.3 (2) specifies maximum cantilevers of balcony joists that far exceed that distance.

While building a free-standing deck allows you to avoid digging to frost depth, it doesn’t avoid the minimum depth of “12 inches below undisturbed ground surface” required by section R403.1.4. Precast block footings cannot be placed directly on grade, and holes must always be dug.

I believe the section about guardrails needs clarification. The code specifies *guards*, which it loosely defines as “a system of building components ...” — there’s no mention of a *rail*. A bench with a back, a planter box, a base cabinet for an outdoor kitchen, or any other component can act as a guard, providing it meets height, load, and opening restrictions.

Glenn Mathewson
Westminster, Colo.

Fighting Stereotypes

I have been a general contractor and remodeler for more than 23 years. I have had to deal with stereotypical comments about how tradespeople are all drunks, crooks, and ne’er-do-wells. There are less than admirable people in all walks of life, but we have had some bad press, to say the least.

Imagine my dismay when I opened up a publication supposedly written by tradespeople for tradespeople that seems to agree with the stereotypes. In “Kids, Tools, and Joy” (*Editor’s Letter*, *PDB*, January/February 2008), Mr. Engel seems to feel that the only people who can succeed in this business are either academically or mentally challenged. How do you explain my success

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LETTERS

then? I have two advanced degrees, both of which I managed to accomplish with honors. I believe it must just be by the grace of God that I can manage to drive a nail straight with some modicum of ability.

I have two very intelligent daughters who believe that what their father does is both important and honorable. They both show an interest in construction, and I would be thrilled and proud if they should fol-

low in my footsteps. I also would not be ashamed of them if they should find a good and decent man to marry who chose construction in which to build his future.

In the future, Mr. Engel may want to curtail his descriptions of his readership as academically challenged; otherwise, we may just smarten up and move on.

Ken Hall
Via e-mail

Unlike most of the people you know, we want your two cents.

While it's nice to hear about what we're doing right, it's more interesting to hear about what we're doing wrong. If you saw something you loved or hated, or if you've got a tip

that could help out other readers, we want to know. Send letters or e-mail to the address below.

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My apologies to Mr. Hall, and to any other reader offended by "Kids, Tools, and Joy." Endorsing unflattering stereotypes about tradespeople was not my intention at all. To be clear, I've spent more years as a carpenter than as an editor, and I abhor the attitude that those who work with their hands are lower on society's ladder than their white-collar counterparts.

I meant that piece to be about the joy of working with one's hands and the value of people who can do that. Additionally, it was a statement that tradespeople often perpetuate a stereotype that paints them as inferior, by buying into it. The question "Would you want your kid to marry a deck builder?" was intended to challenge readers to consider their own attitudes, not to suggest that anyone's child should hesitate to marry a deck builder. — Andy Engel, Editor ❖