

Spec Writing: How Much Control Should We Have?

By **ROBB SMITH, RRC**

WHEN WRITING SPECS, SHOULD WE MANDATE every material or installation procedure?

I was recently contacted by two different roof system manufacturers' technical personnel who complained about two different practices of some roof consultants, both of which relate to the same concept.

One stated that some consultants seem to believe that it is their option and privilege to design a single-ply roof system using components which do not comply with any system they have tested or approved. The other was concerned that they were being forced to have their MB laps torched instead of mopped, when they don't believe torched laps with a mopped system perform well, and therefore may affect the long-term warranty requirements imposed.

These situations arise when we place two or three "similar" manufacturers' systems in the same spec, trying to provide equal systems for contractors to bid. Taking the latter example, we design the spec around Manufacturer A, who requires that the mopped-down MB system "shall have the laps torched" as a separate and distinct step. To provide "equals," we include Manufacturers B and C, who require their laps be mopped as part of the same step when mopping the sheet. If we then allow company B or C's application procedures if they get the job with the selected contract, this would not be an issue. If the descriptive installation instruction is done as an attempt at writing a proprietary specification, there are still protocols which must be followed.

There are a couple of important issues which need to be addressed in these examples. Both are directly related to our risk and our responsibility. First, do we want to design something which other involved parties believe may lead to a fail-

ure of the system? Do we really want to take on more liability by requiring a contractor or manufacturer to do something which they do not believe is "prudent," or which is not accepted in their printed recommended installation procedures?

The second issue is that of voiding fire and wind performance approvals which have been granted based upon testing of a complete and defined system. Our clients depend upon us, as the specifiers, to design a system which meets their insurance and local code requirements. Indiscriminate changes can negate the system approval which was designed to meet these requirements.

Both examples present difficult positions to defend in court. So the message is simple. If we know that all the components in our design are better, or that the installation procedures perform equally or better to those of a particular manufacturer, we should meet with the manufacturer in advance of the bid process. The objective of that meeting is to convince them of the merits of our system, asking that they test and approve it in advance of publishing the project specifications.

No one company or person has all the answers. Many RCI consultants have brought alternative installation solutions and new ideas for roof systems to manufacturers which they have adopted.

Rather than being an obstacle in the path of roofing progress, we can be a valuable contributor for the good of the industry—a partner for progress.

Please send any comments on this topic to Robb via fax at 702-825-9256 or e-mail to RobbSmith@advroof.com.

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