

Help Wanted

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A spray fireproofing contractor emphasizes education and involvement to strengthen the industry's muscles and influence.



Ornamental steel column with intumescent fireproofing, made by AD Firefilm II, applied at Bloomingdales department store in Soho, New York.

I am the owner and operator of a fireproofing and specialty coatings contracting firm. I represent the fifth generation of my family in the painting business. My earliest contracting experience was primarily as an industrial painting contractor, which is where I was first introduced to spray fireproofing. One of the many specialties we performed was the use of intumescent fireproof coatings in industrial complexes such as power plants, sewage treatment plants, and pharmaceutical and semi-conductor plants. I always had a strong interest in this part of my family's business and today I find my company totally immersed in the fireproofing world.

I'm sure I am not alone when it comes to continually re-educating oneself. I am compelled to learn all there is to know about different aspects of the fireproofing business. In order to facilitate this, I am involved in many national and local trade organizations. I am a U.L.-tested member of the National Fireproofing Contractors Association and a Society of Protective Coatings Certified Protective Coatings Specialist. And I am the vice president of the Plaster and Spray Fireproofing Contractors of Greater New York.



Ornamental column with AD Firefilm II intumescent fireproofing at Bloomingdales.

As part of my duties as a member of the PSFC, I investigate and educate the members on the current issues affecting our industry. In addition, I am the fireproofing segment instructor of an AIA-approved six-credit course that the PSFC provides to architects

for continuing education credits. In that course, I cover all aspects and issues of spray fireproofing—from history to building codes.

Industry challenges



A combination of castelated ("smart beams") and wide flange steel beams with high-density fireproofing Cafco Fendolite M II, from Solatek, at The Grand Avenue Bus Facility, Queens.

The most important issue facing our industry today is the reduction in the use of spray fireproofing due to the manipulation and amending of the International Building Code. In addition, independent state and municipal agencies that work outside the local jurisdictions make value judgments based on the fact that a structure is deemed non-combustible and therefore does not need to be fireproofed.

The current building codes are in dire need of change if the fireproofing industry is to survive as a whole. Organizations, such as AWCI and the NFCA, are at the forefront in the fight to revamp these codes. I have witnessed an amazing decline in the use of spray fireproofing in public schools, office buildings and other public institutions. It seems that the design community is using the building codes (which are minimum standards) to exclude fireproofing from projects.

There are trade-offs being made for sprinkler protection that are in the code but make no sense. Sprinklers and spray fireproofing serve different roles in fire protection. Sprinklers are meant to actively suppress a fire, allowing time for firefighters to do their job, while spray fireproofing provides passive fire protection for the structural integrity of the building in a fire. The combination of sprinklers and spray fireproofing of structural members is the logical approach.

In the case of fire, if the sprinklers fail—and they can—spray fireproofing may be the only thing



Intumescent fireproofing applied to ornamental columns at Bloomindales Soho.

protecting fire fighters from a building's collapse, not to mention property loss. It is up to everyone to be aware of this problem and support those who are working very hard to correct this problem.



Exposed fireproofing in a retail store. Product by Southwest Vermiculite Type 5.

Another issue that affects the fireproofing industry is the market effect of the thermally restrained vs. unrestrained classification. The switching from unrestrained to restrained to save money is very prevalent. I truly believe there is an ignorance associated with the proper designing of fireproofing systems for buildings. It is clearly stated in the building codes that all structures are to be considered unrestrained unless a determination is made by the design professional to the contrary.

Fireproofing contractors offering bids based upon the use of restrained assemblies is inappropriate unless the bid documents state otherwise. The design professionals, construction managers and general contractors need to be better educated as to this requirement and not be misled in the quest to spend less money. They should be aware and responsible to build safely and according to the standards that have been set.

Certification

An issue that is at the forefront is the certification of fireproofing contractors: If plumbers and electricians require certification, why not fireproofers?

Fireproofers provide a life safety aspect to buildings and they should have the knowledge and integrity that can only be ensured with certification and licensing. As an active member of the fireproofing community, I have joined the newly formed NFCA, an organization comprised of contractors and material suppliers who are looking to better the fireproofing industry.



Sprayer at the PATH Terminal Restoration Site, at Ground Zero.



Fireproofing contractor applying intumescent fireproofing at the New York Hilton Health Club. Material supplied by AlbiClad TF.

The NFCA, in conjunction with Underwriters Laboratories, has developed the first U.L.-approved contractor certification program. This program is designed to teach fireproofing contractors on how to properly install spray fire-resistive materials, ensure the proper interpretation of building codes and the U.L. guide, and how to properly apply the designs therein. At the completion of the course, a two-hour test (developed by U.L.) is given, with a required passing grade of 80 percent. After the test has been passed, a quality assurance manual needs to be developed and submitted to the U.L. Upon approval

of the manual, the U.L. will then audit the contractor to ensure that the contractor is qualified.

I could continue to discuss the issues affecting the fireproofing industry, as well as the seminars, conventions and symposiums that are dedicated to them. The most important issue is education. Contractors need to educate themselves and their customers with each and every new issue that arises. This industry is ever changing and not necessarily for the better. Contractors need to provide as much information in their proposals as they can, with information pertaining to design requirements, value engineering, and even the basic requirements, such as masking and protection, hoisting, water, heat and power.



Spraying mineral fiber fireproofing at the Highlands Project, in Brewster, N.Y.



Building truss four-hour rated with AlbiClad TF, at MTA

All too often, low bids are provided with minimal—and misleading—information. A complete proposal may open your customers' eyes and have them look a little closer at that low bid. You never know. I've gotten my share of work coming in second or even third place on competitive bidding situations.

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