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Cellular PVC products meeting demands for low maintenance, high durability, energy efficiency

Builders, homeowners enjoy cellular PVC's lifecycle advantage

By Bob Simon

Homes with lower maintenance requirements and that meet increasingly stringent durability regulations are becoming the norm in the home-building and home-renovation world. Cellular PVC products are satisfying those demands, placing the cellular PVC industry in a more prominent position.

Cellular PVC has many advantages over wood and other polyvinyl chloride materials for both interior and exterior home use.

More often than not, cellular PVC competes as a building material with wood. For the purposes of energy, aesthetics and workability, cellular PVC compares favorably with wood.

For the homeowner, cellular PVC offers superior fuel efficiency, lower maintenance and pleasing aesthetics.

For the contractor, cellular PVC is as easy to work with as wood, requiring the same tools to cut, drill and nail. Cellular PVC comes in various colors but also can be painted. Designers enjoy the flexibility of a material that – unlike alternatives such as fiberglass – can be bent to accommodate curved windows and doorways.

For window and door manufacturers, cellular PVC products are more energy-efficient than rigid vinyl but not as expensive as clad windows.

In certain states, contractors are finding cellular PVC attractive for entirely different reasons. As states increase product callback requirements, contractors find peace-of-mind in using cellular PVC. Unlike wood, PVC will not rot or mold, making it a callback-free product for contractors.

Standard construction warrantees protect owners from defects for one year, but state legislature and court rulings are extending that period, which should make PVC an even easier choice. In California, the statute of repose extends contractors' liability for 10 years, and the state's court of appeals has decided that the callback period may be extended if the contractor that performed the defective work attempts repairs. So, if there is a callback, the callback clock gets reset to zero, and the contractor is automatically liable for another 10 years of defects.

Just figuring out when a period of liability mandated by a statute of repose starts is difficult enough. Suffice to say, if cellular PVC can help keep contractors and specifiers out of court in an increasing litigious industry, this durable material – which at least through our company carries a lifetime warranty – will see increasing use independent of other considerations. As state governments make durable rot-and mold-free materials more appealing, federal import regulations are making wood even less desirable as a building material.

The lifecycle advantage of cellular PVC is evidenced by comparing it to commonly used clear pine trim. Primed and painted, such pine will typically not last beyond 25 years in the Midwest. Finger-joint pine primed and painted typically will not last more than 15 years. And both those pine products would require at least two cycles of replacement over a 30-year period vs. Gossen's cellular PVC millwork.

Cellular PVC building materials are gaining a foothold in the building marketplace because of its benefits. Keep in mind that cellular PVC was only certified for outdoor use by the American Architectural Manufacturers Association in 2002, opening up new product categories and markets that Gossen Mouldings Corp. and other companies are only beginning to penetrate.

A move by a major national association points out the heightened role of synthetic products in the home building and remodeling industries. The California-based Wood Moulding & Millwork Producers Association has just opened its membership to manufacturers of polystyrene, PVC, composite and other non-wood products. "We recognize this distinct group is a growing part of the moulding and millwork industry," association executive vice president Kellie A. Schroeder said.

Currently, cellular PVC accounts for only 5.6 percent of the $3.2 billion US wood moulding market –and as even smaller fraction of the completed window system market. But because of the above-mentioned factors, our sector will grow, and grow rapidly.

Gossen is prepared for that growth, and is responding to the market with new products and extended product lines. Already the company offers more than 150 moulding profiles. Last year, Gossen introduced its no-draft window moulding intended for windows that will withstand hurricane conditions. The company also introduced a rot-free door frame moulding, intended for use in areas where high moisture causes rot and mold problems, but good for use in any climate where condensation occurs. Earlier this year, the company introduced a Select line of trim board for exterior use.

We will continue to listen to the marketplace and develop innovative products for home builders and home renovators, and for window and door fabricators – products that will please their customers and increase their business potential.

Bob Simon is executive vice president of Gossen Corp., a cellular PVC manufacturer with headquarters in Milwaukee and a plant near Atlanta. Gossen is on the web at www.gossenmouldings.com.

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