



Assessing Building Materials

Builders face many choices in selecting new products, materials, equipment and fixtures (collectively “building materials”) to use in the construction of a home. Builders can determine which building materials best fit their needs by obtaining information about new or unfamiliar items from manufacturers and distributors. Reviewing building material choices in advance may help eliminate non-conforming building materials and returns, and possibly, disputes.

NAHB developed this guide for builders that may not have their own review process, to assist in gathering information from manufacturers and distributors when considering the selection of new building materials.

How to Use this Guide

Use this guide to evaluate the specifications for building materials, including their characteristics, certifications and country of origin.

- Assess the building materials yourself through questions, such as those provided;
- Communicate with the manufacturer or distributor directly; or
- Require your subcontractor to utilize a similar evaluation process.

Data Collection and Review Process

Each section below includes a series of data points about the building materials you may purchase or utilize. At the conclusion of the review process, determine the following:

- How many data points did I capture?
- Do I understand the make-up of the building materials?
- Are similar building materials available from another manufacturer that can provide more data?
- Is the data that was provided complete?
- Do I have confidence in the manufacturer?
- Does another manufacturer improve my confidence in these building materials?

Do the building materials merit a detailed analysis based on your prior experience or widely reported issues with similar materials?

If so, consider the following:

Identify the Building Materials

Brand and common name of the building materials:

Description of raw materials, components and ingredients:

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- Are there published standards of performance or quality for these types of materials?
 - Are there any codes applicable to the building material and information on compliance?
 - What information does the manufacturer provide?
 - Material Safety Data Sheet
 - Certifications or verifications with individual shipments documenting compliance with applicable standards?
 - Are manufacturing dates relevant to the material’s performance?

- Are there any other objective measures of quality or performance?
- Does the manufacturer advise that the building material meets any specific performance standards (e.g., Energy Star rating, etc.)?

How Were the Building Materials Manufactured

- Are there specific standards for the manufacturing process?
 - If so, does the manufacturer provide verification that its building materials were assembled to standard?
 - Does the manufacturer provide information on its quality assurance program?
- Are the building materials manufactured domestically or are they imported?
- Is the source of the building materials significant?

Identify the Manufacturer

- Who is the manufacturer?
 - Business office locations
 - Affiliate and parent companies
- Are there any questions about the manufacturer's longevity, financial condition or resources?
- Who else is in the supply chain (distributors, wholesalers or retailers)?
 - What role do they play in product returns, warranty service or information providing?
- Who is the direct seller of the material?
- What other manufacturers provide similar building materials?

Testing

- Are the building materials subject to any required testing?
- Does the manufacturer advise that any other third-party testing has been performed?
- Has the manufacturer had the building material tested in a residential environment?
- Has the manufacturer tested the building material for compatibility with other materials or systems typically used in a residence?
- For any of the foregoing, what test data is available?

How Will Building Materials Be Used

- Are the installation instructions available online or in advance of a purchase?
- Who can perform the installation?
- Is specialized training or certification required of installers?
- Does the manufacturer perform post-installation reviews or inspections?

Warranty

- What warranty does the manufacturer provide?
 - What is covered?
 - For how long?
 - Is an extended warranty available?
 - Must any part of the warranty be purchased?
 - How do you act on the warranty to make a claim?
 - What remedy is provided by the warranty?
- Can the warranty be passed along to the home owner?
- Are any warranties provided by others in the supply chain (e.g., distributors, retailers)?

Your Assessment of the Building Materials

- Do you have sufficient information to feel comfortable with the selection of this building material?
- Do you need additional information from installers to third parties?

This guide, including the checklist, is intended to assist builders in reviewing new or unfamiliar materials and is not intended to be exhaustive or all-inclusive. This guidance is not to be considered as a standard, a minimum requirement, or a best practice for the selection of materials, and the assessment metric presented herein is not the only way to evaluate building materials. Satisfaction of all items on the checklist is no assurance that building materials or their manufacturer will be satisfactory.

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