UNICOM METHOD OF COMPONENT CONSTRUCTION AND IMPROVED LUMBER SIZE STANDARDS

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INTRODUCTION TO FILM - "UNICOM CONSTRUCTION"

I have the privilege of discussing two important subjects of current interest to the lumber industry. Both originated from a series of meetings held in 1958 between principals in the lumber industry and principals in the design and construction fields which utilize our products. From these meetings two important recommendations were made to the lumber industry. One was that we should standardize the grades and sizes of lumber available from the different producing regions. The second was that a standardized method of using components for light frame construction should be developed.

For years various methods of component construction have been available to the building industry. And the high rate of acceptance of these various methods was an indication of the need to save material, labor and finance charges by reducing excessively long on-site assembly time.

UNICOM is the result of a three year study by Richard Pollman and Home Planners, Inc., Detroit, Michigan. It is a dimensioning system designed to provide a modular framework within each standardized components and products can be used. It is the first system which considers the design and construction of components for the complete framework of the house from the foundation to the roof.

The advantages of industry acceptance at a standard method for design and construction of houses are readily apparent.

Where a window manufacturer today makes about 500 different units to satisfy the residential building industry, with the full scale adoption of UNICOM he could reduce this number of units to as few as 60 different units at no sacrifice in style or design possibilities. Similar reductions in other components such as cabinets, kitchen and bathroom units could be expected.

Stud lengths would be uniform, stairway construction would be standardized and 1/2 slope rises for trusses would be eliminated.

In addition the organized attitude which the pre-planning of UNICOM gives to a job will result in measurable cost savings and improved quality. Labor supervision is simplified by more shop and less field labor and material waste is reduced by pre-planning of the materials necessary and pre-cutting the material for its end use before sending it to the jobsite.

Manual #1, Design Principles of UNICOM, was published in April, 1962. Manual #2, the "Fabrication" manual was released at the 1963 annual meeting of the National Association of Home Builders in Chicago. As you can see, if from nothing else but size, some extensive work went into the preparation of these two manuals. Both are available from NLMA.

The movie you are about to see was filmed in the Chicago area. The component plant is the Edward Hines Lumber Company plant. I think you will find the film both interesting and informative and I will try to field any questions you may have after the film is shown.

IMPROVED LUMBER SIZE STANDARDS

My second subject today is one of high current interest to the lumber industry. It is the first step in the total grade standardization program recommended by the Economic Council of the lumber industry back in 1958. It should be of particular interest to you gentlemen who are directly concerned with the production of dry lumber.

The organized element of the lumber industry has recognized that improved markets for lumber and wood products in the future can result only from greater consumer acceptance of a product produced to higher quality standards and having greater in place economy. Toward this end, a committee on grade standardization composed of industry leaders from all regions and representing all producers, large and small, green and dry, was set up within NLMA to develop a uniform and simplified system of grades and grade requirements for soft wood lumber.

An important phase of this activity dealt with the establishment of a new standard for soft wood lumber sizes on the basis of a specified moisture condition. Recommendations establishing standard sizes based on a 19% maximum moisture content and provisions for surfacing unseasoned material proportionately oversize, was made by this industry committee to the American Lumber Standards Committee in November, 1961. The American Lumber Standards Committee is appointed by the Department of Commerce and comprised of representatives of lumber manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, architects, consulting engineers, contractors, etc. In other words, all elements concerned with manufacture, distribution, design, specification and use of lumber are represented on the ALS Committee.

After some modification of the industry committee recommendations, the American Lumber Standards Committee, by a final vote of 14 to 2, recommended approval of the new size standards to the Department of Commerce and a revision to the Department of Commerce publication, SPR16-53, which sets forth standard industry practices. At this time, August, 1963, the proposed revision became the responsibility of the Department of Commerce. Since that time the proposed revision has become a political football and has met with delay after delay. The principle of relating lumber size to moisture content is not new and the current proposal has been subjected to scrutiny and endorsed by the best wood technologists and lumber engineers in the land. The structural adequacy of the new sizes have been verified by the Forest Products Laboratory at Madison, Wisconsin and their calculations on shrinkage have been verified by the Oregon Forest Products Laboratory at Corvallis, Oregon. The Research Committee of the National Association of Home Builders has studied the revisions and has endorsed them. From a technical standpoint there is no sound reason for opposing the revision. However, for economic reasons a minority lead by some west coast producers of unseasoned lumber have very effectively frustrated the adoption of these standards which many feel are vital if the lumber industry is to survive the onslaught on its markets by such competitive materials as steel, aluminum, concrete and plastics. It appears that every decision made or action taken by the Department of Commerce has tended to bend over backwards to make certain that those who are seeking to defeat the new standard would not accuse the Department of unfairness. First, the proposals were returned to the ALS Committee with the request that they be placed in proper form. Second, the proposals were delayed for a month to permit the minority of two to write their objecting statement which, it had been decided,

would accompany transmittal of the proposal to the acceptor list. The third delay resulted from an alleged desire buttressed by political pressure to give everyone an opportunity to be listed among the acceptors. We waited as lists of casket manufacturers, clothes pin producers, broom handle manufacturers, soil pipe producers and other remotely interested groups were compiled. The end result was a mailing of 21,000 copies of the proposed standard in contrast to 1,000 ballots which were mailed to secure acceptance of the last ALS revision. A final delay caused by a question of the legality of the revised standard was overcome and, finally, on April 6, the ballots were mailed to the 21,000 acceptors, or I should say, supposedly 21,000 acceptors. A careful count of the names on the acceptor list reveals only slightly more than 12,000 names. How could this be? Well, the various associations were asked to submit a list of 20% of their members to be polled so an individual or firm could have been on the list as a result of his name being submitted by WCLA, by WPA, by AITC, by the Forest Products Research Society, or any of the other associations or organizations to which a company or individual might belong. In addition, anyone who wrote a letter to the Department, either pro or con regarding the revision, was sent a ballot and anyone who wrote in asking to receive a ballot was sent one. I know one man who received five ballots. The sad part about it is that many who should have been polled were not and many who couldn't care less were polled.

Even in the format of the acceptor ballot it would appear that every handicap had been placed in the way of securing an affirmative vote. Rather than providing the acceptors with a list of the essential changes to the standard being proposed by the ALS Committee, the entire standard with the changes included was reproduced and distributed as the ballot. I don't know how many of you have ever read SPR16 but is is not easy reading. But if an acceptor waded all the way through it, he would note that the actual abllot was the back cover of the pamphlet which he was to tear off, fill out and send in along with a separate letter stating why he was either in favor of or opposed to the adoption of the revised standard. Since the revised portions of the standard were not flagged out in the pamphlet, I understand that objections are being made to provisions in the existing standard that have not been changed at all. Many people that I talked to were not even aware that they had received a ballot. They thought the actual ballot was just another piece of literature concerning the standard and it was set aside to be read "when I get time" or deposited in the found file. An article in the Portland Oregonian stated that the Department of Commerce had received only 2,500 ballots by the deadline, May 5.

There have been various rumors as to how the vote is running in the Department of Commerce but our best information states that the result will not be known even within the Department of Commerce until late June or early July. The Department of Commerce has stated that the ballots will be weighted. In other words, a vote from a producer of lumber will be more meaningful than a vote of a casket manufacturer or a longshoreman. And, supposedly a vote substantiated by sound reasoning will count more than a vote not so substantiated. However, we're not quite sure what will be considered a good reason and what will not. We also do not know what per cent approval the Department of Commerce will require before they will approve the new standard. So you can see, there are a number of ifs, whys and buts, to be considered before the revision is approved or rejected.

A logical question at this point might be, "How long will it be before we have a decision one way or the other?" Your guess is as good as mine. Congressman James Roosevelt of California who has opposed the acceptance of the new standard has indicated he will hold public hearings on the proposed new size standards some time in July. Mr. Roosevelt is chairman of the House Sub-Committee on Small Business and claims the proposal will be harmful to the small businessman. The Department of Commerce may not make any decision until Mr. Roosevelt has submitted his report. Some people doubt that there will be any decision until after the November elections.

In view of this uncertain situation with the Department of Commerce, the lumber industry should be prepared to meet all possibilities. Mr. A. J. Agather spoke on this subject at the NLMA Spring Meeting held in Portland, Oregon last month. I have drawn quite heavily on Mr. Agather's

comments in Portland for my talk today and I know of no better source on this subject. Mr. Agather is chairman of the American Lumber Standards Committee. If the Department of Commerce accepts the new standard, then our biggest industry problem, at least for the immediate future, is solved.

If, however, the majority is not a substantial one, the Department of Commerce may elect to take no action. Mr. Agather proposes an interesting alternative if this occurs. Since approval of the proposed standards is virtually unanimous within the Federation Associations of NLMA, what is to prevent us from adopting these standards as "National" standards, since we have every assurance that they are in the consumer's best interests and will provide for more effective promotion of lumber.

This is certainly a possibility.

Another possibility is that 1-1/2" lumber will become a standard through use rather than Department of Commerce adoption. A number of companies are already producing dry dimension to 1-1/2" and say they will continue to produce it whatever the Department of Commerce decision is and I hasten to point out that 1-1/2" dimension is authorized under our present standard SPR16-53 provided it is so stamped. It could be that acceptance of 1-1/2" lumber dried to more rigid standards will increase to the point where our customers will not only be accepting it, they will be demanding it. If the decision were left strictly to lumber users, there is no doubt but what it would be approved. Our customers do not like the idea of buying and paying freight on a 1-5/8" x 9-1/2" 2x10 when a 1-1/2" x 9-1/2" 2x10 would do the job anymore than we like needlessly manufacturing the piece oversize for the job for which it was intended. According to the House and Home Round Table on Wood requiring the same dimensions for dry lumber as we require for green lumber results in a waste which is costing the American home buying public close to $100,000,000 a year. The elimination of a waste of this magnitude is essential if the lumber industry is to maintain its markets in the face of ever-increasing competition.