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ICC Completes Initial Public Hearings on Proposals to the 2015 I-Codes
The more things change, the more they stay the same. This oft-quoted statement might be the best way to sum up the events at the initial public hearings conducted in Dallas by the International Code Council (ICC). More

Technology Transfer Requests Increase At 1-800-79-STEEL And Ask An Expert!
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COLD-FORMED STEEL ENGINEERS INSTITUTE – NEWS AND UPDATES

2012 CFSEI Expo Recap
The just-completed 2012 CFSEI Expo held May 21-22 in Orlando, Florida drew 100 design professionals and engineers for an intensive two-day educational and networking experience. More

Sign Up! CFSEI “Back to Basics” for Design Engineers Webinar
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US Private Construction Spending Grows, Manufacturing Leads
US overall construction spending looks a little rosier, as private construction continued to grow in April and spending levels for March were revised upward. More

New Environmental Product Declaration Program Launched
ICC Evaluation Service (ICC-ES) Environmental Programs announces the launch of a new program, the Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) Program. More

US Home Starts And Industrial Output Rebound
Demand for rental units led a rebound in US new home construction last month, suggesting that the troubled sector is turning around. More

Positive Conditions Persist for Architecture Billings Index
The commercial sector continues to lead the Architecture Billings Index (ABI) which has remained in positive territory for the fifth consecutive month. More

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America’s Steel Industry Is Leading Manufacturing Out of the Recession
A report recently released by Timothy J. Considine, professor of energy economics at the University of Wyoming, reveals that the American steel industry is playing a significant role in leading manufacturing’s post-recession resurgence primarily because it is highly interrelated with many other sectors of the economy. More

Weekly Mill Capability Utilization Rate Passes 80% In US
US weekly crude steel output rose again last week, pushing production and capability utilization to the highest levels seen so far this year. More

Multifamily Leads Permits Surge
Housing permits were up 4.5% in March thanks to a 20.8% surge in multifamily activity, according to data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. More

LEED 2012 Postponed to 2013, Renamed LEED v4
In a surprise move, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) announced today that it is postponing plans to ballot the next version of LEED until as late as June 2013. More

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TOP STORIES

ICC Completes Initial Public Hearings on Proposals to the 2015 I-Codes

The more things change, the more they stay the same. This oft-quoted statement might be the best way to sum up the events at the initial public hearings conducted in Dallas by the International Code Council (ICC). Few major implications for cold-formed steel (CFS) framing emerged from this set of hearings, although many of the same issues will undoubtedly be reintroduced through public comments that can be submitted prior to August 1, 2012.

The structural, general, fire safety plumbing, and mechanical code change committees of the ICC met during the last days of April and early May to address hundreds of code change proposals to the International Building Code (IBC) and other International Codes that primarily impact commercial and larger residential buildings. The International Residential Code (IRC), International Energy Conservation Code (IECC), and International Green Construction Code (IgCC) will be considered in 2013 and 2014, leading up to a new set of 2015 I-codes.

Given the vast number of proposals heard in Dallas, this article will only focus on some key issues affecting the CFS industry. However, a complete list of proposals and results of the committee decisions are published on the ICC website at www.iccsafe.org. A full report with specific language approved by floor modifications at the hearings will be available sometime this month.

Special Inspections Keep Coming Back

In recent years, perhaps the most significant threat to CFS is repeated attempts to introduce costly and unnecessary special inspections into the code that require the use of independent third parties. Although SFA has supported special inspections for items such as welding, we believe that the traditional materials and practices used in typical CFS framing applications can be adequately inspected by the local jurisdiction as part of their already-existing routine inspections. While some engineering associations support third-party inspections, most committee members in Dallas agreed with SFA, and therefore the proposals for creating new requirements were rejected.

AISI Non-Structural Standard Approved

The AISI Committee on Framing Standards has worked hard over the past year to develop a standard that the steel industry could support for non-structural framing members. We are pleased to report that the ICC-Structural Committee approved AISI S220, North American Standard for Cold-Formed Steel Framing – Nonstructural Members, 2011 Edition.

…Continued next page
AISI S220 is applicable to commonly recognized nonstructural members such as wall studs used in interior partition walls. It is also applicable to other members, as long as they meet the nonstructural definition and limitations.

"This new publication brings the design and manufacturing requirements for cold-formed steel nonstructural members into one standard, making it easier for design professionals to specify and building officials to approve steel for building projects," Jay Larson, P.E., F. ASCE, Managing Director, Construction Technical Program, said. "The standard is exceptional in that it was developed by a consensus committee, subjected to an independent public review process, and then was approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) in less than six months, allowing us to transfer this information to the design community in a tightly compressed timeframe."

**ACI 318 Anchorage Requirements**

In the last code change cycle to develop the 2012 IBC, the steel industry successfully obtained CFS exemptions from new anchorage requirements that were adopted by reference to the ACI 318 standard for concrete design. In the current cycle, AISI worked on a proposal that improved on the previous exemptions for steel. At the same time, proposals from other organizations were submitted to delete the exemptions altogether. Despite substantiation from research conducted by the steel industry supporting the AISI proposal to expand and improve the exemptions, the committee disapproved all of the proposals except for one. Fortunately, the approved proposal retains the exemptions for CFS similar to those in the 2012 code. Unless overturned at the Final Action Hearings, CFS will remain covered under the exemptions. The Final Action Hearings are scheduled for October 2012 before the full membership of the ICC. The membership can either overturn or confirm the committee decisions, or go a completely different route and approve a public comment submitted on a specific proposal.

**Sometimes, What Helps Also Hurts**

The vast majority of substantive proposals were disapproved since the various committees chose not to make key changes to the IBC. On one hand, this stand is beneficial to SFA members on items such as special inspections and other proposals that attempted to expand the use of combustible materials in taller buildings. But on the other hand, it hurt the SFA’s proactive stand on similar issues. For instance, several proposals submitted by SFA to close loopholes in the code that allow wood in five- and six-story buildings were rejected. The SFA is now studying comments from committee members to determine if public comments are appropriate in order to reintroduce similar proposals during the Final Action Hearings for Group A.

**Upcoming ICC Deadlines**

The Dallas hearings are just the start of a multiple-year process to develop the 2015 I-Codes, which will greatly impact the competitiveness of CFS construction. In the coming months, SFA will be working to meet a series of important due dates established by the ICC.

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This month, the ICC will release the full report on the Dallas hearings, leaving less than two months to study the report and draft public comments by the August 1 deadline.

The public comments will be published approximately two months before October’s Final Action Hearings. The SFA will evaluate the public comments and determine which ones to support or oppose, then develop testimony for the hearings.

Finally, the deadline for Group B proposals is January 3, 2013. Although that date seems far off, SFA is already working on proposals for the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) and other codes in Group B. Check back in future issues of Framework Online for updates.

- Editor, Framework Online
TOP STORIES

Technology Transfer Requests Increase At 1-800-79-STEEL And Ask An Expert!

People often wonder what types of calls we get on the Steel Hotline (1-800-79-STEEL) and through the “Ask an Expert” online submittal form. The answer is anything but straightforward – all types of requests! We receive a variety of inquiries, including construction professionals needing clarification on which publications to purchase, or wanting to prove that there is no need to retouch studs and joists cut in the field with zinc-enriched paint.

One of the most interesting requests involved a three-way call from an engineer at a job site with a code inspector. The code inspector had his information in hand and was trying to explain to the engineer that the nomenclature for CFS had changed back in 2000, when the specification for the thickness of steel studs changed from gauge to mils. In this case, the engineer had not specified the correct thickness in the exterior wall. From the conversation, it appeared that the engineer had specified 20 gauge, and the contractor had installed 30 mil instead of the required 33 mil for the structural wall. After speaking with the SFA representative and getting the issue straightened out, the inspector called back again to give credit to his state code association for sponsoring a seminar on this subject several years ago. Were it not for the seminar, he would not have had the knowledge he needed to properly inspect the building. We were encouraged that the Steel Hotline is still THE one-stop resource for CFS technical inquiries right from the field.

WHAT Construction Market Downturn? Over the years, we have seen that the Steel Hotline serves as a real indicator of the state of the construction market for cold-formed steel. The Steel Hotline has served the cold-formed steel framing and construction industries since the mid-1990s, and continues to provide valuable information to builders, architects, code inspectors and other construction professionals.

In just the first half of 2012, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of inquiries. The type and volume of calls we are receiving indicate that design and construction projects are picking up. For instance, during the downturn of the construction market beginning in 2008, both the Steel Hotline and “Ask an Expert” resources logged a total of 298 inquiries for the entire year. Compare that to the first five months of 2012, where we have already logged a total of 310 requests—outpacing all of 2008 in less than half of the year! The inquiries by topic are best categorized as follows:

- 47% — Design-related
- 28% — Construction-related
- 15% — Specifications, Standards and Codes
- 5% — “Green” Building
- 3% — Corrosion
- 2% — Other

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The breakdown of callers by profession is:

- 32% — Architects
- 28% — Engineers
- 15% — Builders/Contractors
- 12% — Code Inspectors,
- 9% — Educators,
- 4% — Other.

Based on the regions of the United States, the West and Southeast lead the way, with 51% of the inquiries. These are followed by the Mid-Atlantic at 23%, the Southwest at 14%, the Midwest at 9%, and the Northeast at 3%. It is no surprise that inquiries vary by region and, of course, time of the year. For example, we expect that the inquiries about thermal insulation and energy codes will start to pick up again in a few weeks.

We believe that the increased inquiry volume is an indication that building projects are moving off the shelves and into the marketplace. We anticipate that you will see more cold-formed steel projects coming your way. Stay tuned for updates in future issues of Framework Online.

- Editor, Framework Online

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2012 CFSEI Expo Recap

The just-completed 2012 CFSEI Expo held May 21-22 in Orlando, Florida drew 100 design professionals and engineers for an intensive two-day educational and networking experience. Participants chose from 15 educational sessions and had several opportunities to network with their peers in the cold-formed steel (CFS) industry. Hosted by the Florida Chapter of CFSEI and sponsored by 10 organizations ranging from stud manufacturers to software developers, the event is the only one of its kind dedicated to the cold-formed steel framing industry.

This year’s keynote speech was delivered by Benjamin Schafer, Ph.D., P.E., chairman of the Department of Civil Engineering at The Johns Hopkins University in Maryland and a nationally recognized innovator in cold-formed steel design. Dr. Schafer’s topic was “Cold-Formed Steel Research and Development for CFSEI”, in which he addressed advancements in cold-formed steel design and recent research on the performance of light steel-framed walls braced with sheathing, OSB, and gypsum board.

During the educational sessions, notable CFS industry experts shared their knowledge, experience and expertise on the following topics:

- Sheathing Braced Design Update on Research
- What is Hot? - Dipped Galvanizing of Cold-Formed Steel
- Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and Environmental Product Declarations (EPD) – The Impact of the Design Professional and Manufacturer
- Welding - Practical Applications
- Strengthening the Weakest Link – Designing Reliable Connections for Cold-Formed Steel Framing
- Update on Steel Deck Diaphragms
- ASCE 7-10: Changes to the Wind Provisions
- Curtain Wall Design for Blast Loads
- Wall Stud Bracing Connections

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Is it Code and will it work?
Stay Ahead of the Curve with Building Information Modeling
Additions to the Code of Standard Practice – What’s New and What’s Missing
Design Considerations for Installing Steel Deck over Cold-Formed Trusses
Solutions Forum
Nonstructural Member: What Does Nonstructural Really Mean?

“In addition to the superb line-up of topics, the Expo provided a great deal of very important networking opportunities,” said Jeff Klaiman of ADTEK Engineers, Inc. of Virginia. A significant result of the conference was the establishment of a Task Group under the direction of the American Iron and Steel Institute’s Committee on Framing Standards to review the issues surrounding steel deck over cold-formed steel trusses and make recommendations for potential further action in AISI’s ongoing standards development process.

A highlight of the Expo was the dinner tour of “Storm Struck,” an interactive exhibit located in Innoventions East at Epcot’s Future World. Attendees experienced a 3D movie-based attraction that takes guests inside a home during a hurricane and then challenges them to redesign the house using modern building techniques that protect the home during severe weather.

Participants were able to meet directly with suppliers at the Trade Expo of technologies and services for the CFS industry. Exhibitors included Platinum Sponsors, Aegis Metal Framing, and ClarkDietrich Building Systems, Gold Sponsor Simpson Strong-Tie, and Bronze Sponsors, Argos Systems, USG Structo-Crete, ACS, TrusSteel, TSN, and MarinoWare, Radius Track, and StrucSoft Solutions.

An annual highlight of the Expo is the presentation of the CFSEI Design Awards. The 2012 CFSEI Design Awards were presented by Nabil Rahman, Ph.D., P.E. of the Steel Network and the new CFSEI Executive Chairman for 2012-2013. The awards were presented in four categories. Congratulations to the winners, which include:

Design Excellence
– Sowri Rajan, P.E. of ITW BCG, TrusSteel, for CFS Bridge Trusses for Material Handling, in Portland, Oregon

Award of Merit
– Winston E. Kile, P.E. of Structuneering Inc., for Mac Dill AFB Building 53 Retrofit

Construction Innovation Award
– Chuck Mears of Radius Track Corporation, for New Hope Interfaith Chapel in Dallas, Texas

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Distinguished Service Award
- Roger LaBoube, Ph.D., P.E., Center for Cold-Formed Steel, Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla, Missouri

As a tradition, CFSEI held its annual General Meeting during the Expo, where the 2012-2013 Executive Committee was installed. Four new members were added to the team, while three serving members retired.

Congratulations to the CFSEI 2012-2013 Executive Committee, which includes:

Chairman – Nabil Rahman, Ph.D., P.E., of The Steel Network
Immediate Past Chairman – Winston E. Kile, P.E., Structuneering, Inc.

Members -
- Jay Larson, P.E., American Iron and Steel Institute
- John Lyons, P.E., S.E., Structural Evolution LLC
- Steven Tipping, P.E., Tipping + Mar
- Brad S. Cameron, P.E.
- Douglas Fox, P.E., iSPAN Systems
- Rahim Zadeh, P.E.

Figure 1 - 2012 CFSEI Design Award Winners. (Pictured left to right) - Ashwin Mupparapu, Chuck Mears, Roger LaBoube, Winston (Ed) Kile, Sowri Rajan, and presenter, Nabil Rahman

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Figure 4 - Alex MacDonald and Frank Pospisil of USG Structo-Crete

Figure 5 - Kevin Brown, Mike Pellock, and Tom Valvo of Aegis Metal Framing

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Brought to you quarterly by the Steel Framing Alliance (SFA) on the first Wednesday of February, June, September and December. Framework Online arms you with important news and commentary on the cold-formed steel (CFS) framing and construction industries.
Based on the strong attendance; high quality of the sessions, Trade Expo and events; and feedback received during the Expo, the overall conclusion is that the 2012 CFSEI Expo was a great success. Many new faces were in attendance as well as many familiar faces, and that’s an excellent testament to the job that CFSEI is doing in meeting the needs of CFS design professionals. We look forward to continuing the mission of CFSEI, and to seeing all of you again next year!

- Editor, Framework Online

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Sign Up! CFSEI “Back to Basics” for Design Engineers Webinar, June 14, 2012

The Cold-Formed Steel Engineers Institute (CFSEI) is pleased to announce its third educational webinar of 2012. This educational event will focus on the applicable AISI North American Specification of Cold-Formed Steel Structural Members and Commentary (S100) and AISI North American Steel Framing – Floor and Roof System Design (S210) design provisions for flexural members. The title of the webinar is “Back to Basics: A Review of AISI S100 And S210 Flexural Member Design Provisions.”

Background: According to Dr. Roger LaBoube, Director of the Wei-Wen Yu Center for Cold-Formed Steel Structures and developer of the webinar, one of the most frequently missed requirements included in AISI S100 and S200 by the design engineer is the need for adequate bracing of cold-formed steel framing members. This oversight prompts numerous calls for technical assistance. “If there is anything that I want participants to take away from the webinar program it would be the requirement for bracing – that’s adequate bracing of both flanges”, said Dr. LaBoube. The 1.5 hour long program will be hosted by “Go to Meeting” format and affords participants the opportunity to interact with Dr. LaBoube and other industry experts.

In addition to the live interaction participants will also receive the session slides along with several CFSEI Technical Notes on the subject being covered. The seminar is open to all interested parties especially structural engineers, specialty structural engineers and forensic engineers. For registration and additional information about this program go to http://www.cfsei.org/hottopics_webinar-06-14-2012.html.

The presenter: Roger A. LaBoube is Curator’s Teaching Professor Emeritus of Civil Engineering, Director of the Wei-Wen Yu Center for Cold-Formed Steel Structures at the Missouri University of Science & Technology (formerly University of Missouri-Rolla). Dr. LaBoube holds B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. in Civil Engineering from the University of Missouri-Rolla. Dr. LaBoube has an extensive background in the design and behavior of cold-formed steel structures. His research and design activities have touched on many facets of cold-formed steel construction to include: cold-formed steel beams, panels, trusses, headers, wall studs as well as bolt, weld, and screw connections.

- Editor, Framework Online
MARKETPLACE

US Private Construction Spending Grows, Manufacturing Leads

US overall construction spending looks a little rosier, as private construction continued to grow in April and spending levels for March were revised upward. But public spending continues to slump across nearly all sectors.

April’s combined seasonally adjusted annualized rate for private and public construction was $820.7bn, up from $818.1bn in March. The March estimate has been revised from $808.1bn, reported last month by the US Census Bureau.

Combined nonresidential spending dipped month-on-month to an annual rate of $558.3bn, which represents a 0.7% slip from March’s rate of $562.3bn but 7.1% growth from April 2011.

The annual rate for private construction was $549.7bn in April – a 1.2% increase from the March estimate of $543.4bn and 12.5% growth y-o-y.

Private manufacturing spending has increased 26.8% y-o-y, as April’s annual rate for the manufacturing sector was nearly $41bn. The private power sector also kicked up spending 25.6% y-o-y to a rate of $86.7bn. Private new multi-family residential spending also climbed 31.4% y-o-y to an annual rate of $18bn.

Public spending slipped 1.4% m-o-m, hitting a seasonally adjusted annualized rate of $271bn in April. March’s revised estimate is $274.7bn.

While public spending lags, one category that reported slightly higher y-o-y spending was the highway and street sector. The annual rate for highway and street spending is $77.3bn, up 3.4% y-o-y. Public spending for educational construction is down 2.4%, dropping to $68.3bn.

Source: Steel Business Briefing, June 1, 2012

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MARKETPLACE

New Environmental Product Declaration Program Launched

ICC Evaluation Service (ICC-ES) Environmental Programs announces the launch of a new program, the Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) Program.

EPDs are designed to meet the global market demand for science-based, transparent, quality assured information about product environmental performance.

Based on Life-Cycle Assessment (LCA), EPDs are rapidly becoming a key component of the material selection process, particularly in the building sector. ICC-ES aims to help meet that demand through the EPD program.

“The overall goal of environmental labels and declarations is to encourage the demand for, and supply of, those products that cause less stress on the environment, through communication of verifiable and accurate information that is not misleading,” says Rob Brooks, Director of ICC-ES Environmental Programs.

“The preference for EPDs is because they simply disclose technical, environmental information, rather than a green marketing claim or brand. Two or more EPDs empower a person to compare the environmental performance of one product to another product, provided the EPDs are based on the same Product Category Rules (PCRs),” added Brooks.

An EPD provides an opportunity for manufacturers to have increased transparency regarding the environmental impacts of their products using established international standards. Often likened to a nutrition label, an EPD provides a summary of the environmental impacts and related information in a form that is accessible, consistent and comparable. Consumers, building design teams, specifiers and other users can then make appropriate, informed product selections.

Manufacturers who apply for ICC-ES EPDs will be eligible to receive the ICC-ES Certified EPD mark following successful completion of the certification, showing that their declarations have been certified by ICC-ES. Achieving this mark will assist products desiring to qualify for various LEED points. For application information, please visit www.icc-es.org, or call 1-800-423-6587, ext. 7325.

Source: EDC, May 15, 2012
MARKETPLACE

US Home Starts And Industrial Output Rebound

Demand for rental units led a rebound in US new home construction last month, suggesting that the troubled sector is turning around.

Separately, US industrial production has risen the most for a month in more than a year, boosted by surging demand in April for cars and utility output.

Housing starts rose 2.6 per cent in April to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 717,000, while March’s figures were revised higher to 699,000, the commerce department said. The reading was better than the 685,000 expected by economists.

The housing market, the sector that precipitated the financial crisis and which has been plagued by an oversupply of unsold homes and properties in foreclosure, has begun to show signs of a slow recovery after almost six years of decline. April’s starts were nearly 30 per cent higher than a year ago but new construction is still well below its pre-crisis peak of January 2006.

“The evidence is growing, in our opinion, that housing construction will advance modestly in 2012,” said John Ryding and Conrad DeQuadros of RDQ Economics.

Stronger demand for rentals has been one factor boosting the market, and that was reflected in Wednesday’s data. Ground breakings on multi-family apartment units accelerated 4.3 per cent to 217,000. Single-family home starts, which make up the majority of housing stock, rose 2.3 per cent to 492,000.

Starts were mixed across the US, with gains in the south and midwest offsetting a sharp 20.7 per cent drop in the north-east and an 8.1 per cent fall in the west.

Permits, a gauge of future construction, declined 7 per cent to 715,000 in April from an upwardly revised three-year high of 769,000 in March. The fall was due to a 22.8 per cent drop in multi-unit apartment buildings; permits for single-family homes rose 1.9 per cent.

But the decline in permits may be temporary as homebuilders have grown more confident that the housing market is turning around. A report on Tuesday showed sentiment among builders rose to a five-year high of 29 in May, with more confidence about sales and buyer traffic over the next six months.

Figures on sales of new and previously owned homes due out next week will give a clearer picture of the health of the market.

…Continued next page
Also on Wednesday, the Federal Reserve said output from US factories, utilities and mines rose 1.1 per cent in April, the fastest growth since December 2010 and almost twice the 0.6 per cent increase forecast by economists.

The Fed also revised its figures for the previous two months from earlier estimates of flat growth to a 0.6 per cent contraction in March and a 0.4 per cent expansion in February.

Last month, manufacturing output rebounded 0.6 per cent from a 0.5 per cent drop in March. Half the rise was due to stronger demand for automobiles and parts, with production rising 3.9 per cent. Car sales have been particularly strong this year as the auto industry has rebounded from a collapse in demand during the financial crisis.

Output of other long-lasting durable goods such as computers and electronics, aerospace and transportation equipment and furniture was also higher.

That offset a 0.2 per cent drop in non-durables led by a 2.6 per cent decline in production of petroleum and coal products.

Utilities output rose 4.5 per cent following a slump in demand for heating due to unseasonably warm weather in the first three months of the year. The nation’s mines were also more productive, with output rising 1.6 per cent in April.

Capacity utilisation, a measure of how fully companies are using their resources for production, hit the highest level in four years at 79.2 per cent. The figure is seen as a signal of overall slack in the economy.

Source: Financial Times, May 16, 2012
Marketplace

Positive Conditions Persist for Architecture Billings Index

Greatest demand for commercial building projects

Washington, D.C. – April 18, 2012 – The commercial sector continues to lead the Architecture Billings Index (ABI) which has remained in positive territory for the fifth consecutive month. As a leading economic indicator of construction activity, the ABI reflects the approximate nine to twelve month lag time between architecture billings and construction spending. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) reported the March ABI score was 50.4, following a mark of 51.0 in February. This score reflects a slight increase in demand for design services (any score above 50 indicates an increase in billings). The new projects inquiry index was 56.6, down from mark of 63.4 the previous month.

“We are starting to hear more about improving conditions in the marketplace, with a greater sense of optimism that there will be greater demand for design services,” said AIA Chief Economist, Kermit Baker, PhD, Hon. AIA. “But that is not across the board and there are still a number of architecture firms struggling so progress is likely to be measured in inches rather than miles for the next few months.”

Key March ABI highlights:

- Regional averages: Midwest (54.1), Northeast (53.9), South (50.1), West (46.6)
- Sector index breakdown: commercial / industrial (56.0), multi-family residential (51.9), institutional (47.7), mixed practice (47.2)
- Project inquiries index: 56.6

The regional and sector categories are calculated as a 3-month moving average, whereas the index and inquiries are monthly numbers.

Source: The American Institute of Architects, April 18, 2012
MARKETPLACE

America’s Steel Industry Is Leading Manufacturing Out of the Recession

A report recently released by Timothy J. Considine, professor of energy economics at the University of Wyoming, reveals that the American steel industry is playing a significant role in leading manufacturing’s post-recession resurgence primarily because it is highly interrelated with many other sectors of the economy.

In his analysis titled, “Economic Impacts of the American Steel Industry,” Dr. Considine notes that “every one job in the U.S. steel industry supports seven jobs in the U.S. economy, reflecting its ripple effect on employment.”

For 2011, the report states, the American steel industry directly employed 150,700 and given the multiplier effect, supported more than 1,022,009 jobs.

Source: Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry, May 15, 2012
Weekly Mill Capability Utilization Rate Passes 80% In US

US weekly crude steel output rose again last week, pushing production and capability utilization to the highest levels seen so far this year. Capability utilization crested the 80% mark in the week ended April 21, reaching a rate of 81.1%.

According to raw materials suppliers, this is the highest weekly production seen since September 2008, before a recession blasted the US steel industry and economy.

US production rose 1.4% last week to an estimated 2m short tons, from 1.98m s.t a week earlier, according to the American Iron and Steel Institute. Capacity utilization rose to 81.1% from 79.9% the week before and 74.2% in the same week of 2011.

Production was up in four of five regions AISI tracks. The southern district's output rose to 703,000 s.t last week from 701,000 s.t a week earlier. Production in the Great Lakes region climbed 3.75% to 694,000 s.t, from 669,000 s.t, and the Midwest saw output reach 229,000 s.t from 223,000 s.t. Western production rose slightly to 94,000 s.t from 93,000 s.t.

In contrast, output in the northeast dipped slightly to 283,000 s.t from 289,000 s.t.

In the first 16 weeks of 2012, US crude steel production totaled 30.9 million s.t - up 7% from the 28.86 million s.t made during the same period last year.

Production figures in AISI's weekly reports are estimates, based on weekly data from 50% of domestic producers and monthly data from the remainder.

Source: Steel Business Briefing, April 24 2012
MARKETPLACE

Multifamily Leads Permits Surge

Housing permits were up 4.5% in March thanks to a 20.8% surge in multifamily activity, according to data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The reading, registering an annual rate of 747,000, was the highest the industry has seen since September 2008 and is 30.1% higher year-over-year. Multifamily alone reached an annual rate of 285,000.

News wasn’t as good for single-family housing, however, which saw a decline of 3.5% on a monthly basis to an annual rate of 462,000.

Starts also had a poor showing, coming in 5.8% lower on a monthly basis, although still up 10.3% annually. Single-family activity was nearly flat with a small downward tick of 0.2%, but multifamily activity fell 19.8%. Those numbers should be taken with a grain of salt, however, says Patrick Newport, U.S. economist at IHS Global Insight, pointing out that, with a margin of error of +/- 15.6%, the reported decline “could also be a measurement error.”

Overall, the report's good news outweighed the bad, Newport said in a statement discussing the numbers today. "The report shows further signs of life in the housing market, but mostly in the multifamily category. What remains unclear is the state of the single-family market. One head scratcher is why single-family permits and starts and builder sentiment have improved over the past five months when new-home sales remain depressed. If the builders have gotten ahead of the game, single-family construction will go through a demoralizing slowdown later this year."

Source: Builder Online, April 17, 2012
LEED 2012 Postponed to 2013, Renamed LEED v4

In response to growing concerns from the market, USGBC is postponing plans to ballot the next version of LEED until 2013.

In a surprise move, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) announced today that it is postponing plans to ballot the next version of LEED until as late as June 2013. With this announcement, USGBC promises to keep LEED 2009 available for a full three years from now, although it intends to gradually ramp up incentives for teams to move to the new version of LEED during that time.

The move came in response to a growing outcry from architects and other building industry professionals—including many who have been core supporters of LEED since its inception—who had three related concerns:

- The proposed changes in the rating system were too much, too fast, especially in a weak real estate market.
- Some of the changes needed more refinement, especially in the Materials & Resources category, where whole new approaches to material selection had been introduced and had changed significantly with each public comment draft.
- Tools and resources needed to achieve the credits would not be widely available by the time the new system was slated to launch in November 2012.

Compounding these concerns were doubts about the ability of USGBC’s sister organization, the Green Building Certification Institute (GBCI) to develop an effective certification process in such a short timeframe—fears that linger after the release of LEED 2009, which was marked by an ill-fated attempt to outsource the certification process to third-party certification bodies and glitches that marred the usability of LEED Online.

LEED users conveyed their concerns directly to USGBC staff and board members, expressed them in formal comments on the various drafts, and debated them on the LEEDUser forums, where Robert Watson of EcoTech International, founding chair of the LEED Steering Committee, argued vehemently for a more measured approach to changes in LEED.

No longer tied to a particular year, USGBC is also reverting to a version naming system for the rating system, so the new version will be called “LEED v4” instead of “LEED 2012.”

Even as it frustrated the many volunteers on the LEED committees who have labored for years on many credits in the proposed draft and are anxious to see them introduced to the market, the new announcement was celebrated by many practitioners in the industry.
"It is gratifying to see that an organization that is nearly twenty years old with 15,000 member organizations still can as be nimble and responsive as the start-up we remember," noted Russell Perry, FAIA, vice president and office director at SmithGroupJJR. "The Council heard many of its members when we said that we were going to need some time to test out the new ideas and make sure they worked in our markets."

The committees have been anticipating these changes for a long time, after the decision with LEED 2009 to minimize technical changes and focus on the reorganization and weighting of the credit structure. As a result, the credit requirement changes in the proposed LEED v4 rating system are the most extensive in LEED’s twelve-year history.

The new announcement comes just a few weeks after USGBC had tried, with limited success, to allay these concerns by postponing the planned ballot from May 2012 to August and by promising to keep LEED 2009 available to project teams for at least six months after the introduction of LEED v4. At that time, USGBC had also announced plans for a “beta test” of the new rating system, but critics had questioned how such a test would be useful if the changes it purported to test were already locked in by member ballot.

The new plan gives time for that beta test to proceed while allowing for its results to inform a fifth public comment draft, which is scheduled to run from October 2 to December 10, 2012. That timeframe encompasses the annual Greenbuild Conference and Expo, allowing for in-person interaction among USGBC members and other stakeholders about the proposed changes.

USGBC asserts that language in LEED supporting the highest standards of forest certification and pushing for transparency and avoidance of chemicals of concern will not be watered down during this extended process, despite unprecedented attacks from the chemical industry, which recently joined the mainstream forest products industry in seeking to undermine LEED by pushing Congress to prohibit the federal government from using it.

Source: BuildingGreen.com, June 4, 2012