



Decision aids for durable wood construction : review and redirection

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Abstract:

The project Decision Aids for Durable Wood Construction underwent a major review with the hiring of a new project leader (O'Connor) in September 1998. In consultation with the project liaisons, the work on this project since its start-up in 1993 was examined, the primary task of developing a computer-based tool for the building industry was reconsidered, the context of worldwide research into building envelope moisture failures was reviewed, and a revised project plan was proposed.

Decision Aids was a self-contained project for its first three years, with efforts concentrated on knowledge acquisition, expert system experimentation and other foundation work for development of a computer tool. With a rise of interest in building envelope moisture failures across North America and elsewhere, Decision Aids activity shifted into a mode that was reactive to projects and events external to Forintek. This was necessary due to the level of effort external agencies, media and research labs were devoting to the topic. In particular, where the actions of outsiders began to have an influence on wood in construction, we found it critical to participate in order to ensure the fair and correct treatment of wood.

The new project leader was asked to review the project and either get the project back on its original track or suggest a redirection. The project goal, to assist end users in best application of wood, was determined to be sound. In addition, the project leader recommended that resources continue to be allocated to participation in outside research efforts and other related activities. However, it was recommended that the project objective to develop computer-based decision tools be reassessed. Instead, the project leader recommended a course of action focused on tasks both shorter in term and smaller in scope, which will enable Forintek to deliver results better tailored to the immediate needs of industry in a time of building envelope moisture failure "crisis."

The new project plan is split into two areas: 1) address building envelope moisture failures that are due to existing information not arriving in the right hands (i.e., a technology transfer problem); and 2) address building envelope moisture failures that are due to a lack of information (i.e., a research problem). The technology transfer area will create a formal plan for communication to the building industry, will enable Forintek to experiment with developing pathways to that new target audience, and will provide the means for the wood industry to provide helpful durability information to the public through a relatively neutral third party (Forintek). The research area will explore opportunities for limited scope experiments or collaborative field studies of wood system durability performance, with the intent of verifying or modifying codes, standards and best practice guides.

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