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# Quality Control

## The Independent Observer

by Richard Tippet, Applied Roofing Technology

(Editor's Note: Richard Tippet, founder of Applied Roofing Technology, Watsonville, Calif., has worked in light and heavy construction for 27 years. Applied Roofing Technology is one of the most complete roof consulting firms on the West Coast. They provide complete laboratory testing facilities. Approximately one-third of the firms work is forensics for the legal defense of developers, roofworkers and stucco contractors. Tippet is a member of the Western States Roofing Contractors Association, the American Institute of Plant Engineers, ASTM and ICBO.)



THERE IS an argument made by some that full-time third party construction inspection of roofing work is a necessity in order to obtain a proper job.

Ed Schreiber of Construction Consultants, Inc., used to argue instead that full-time inspection was for the protection of the roofing contractor on warranty work, if the manufacturer attempted to blame failures on defective workmanship, the inspectors logs would serve as the roofer's defense.

Rich Boon makes an argument in the RIEI spring information letter that bidders who know that third party observers will be on the job will tend to level out the bidding process, as well as preventing the job from being shorted. He wisely expresses concern about the level of knowledge of the observer.

There is merit in both Schreiber's and Boon's arguments. Our inspector's logs and other tests and records are currently the first line of defense for a roofing contractor who retained us to provide quality control records while he

*A dozen years of experience has taught us that the best contractors do not need third party observers overseeing their work.*

installed a roof overlay, in the winter, designed and manufactured by a third party to the client's proprietary specification. At other times our records have helped to determine the causes of seam failures, to document the sources of moisture in insulation and to defend both roofing contractors and general contractors against back-charges and delay claims.

On another project, a warranty job, we arrived on site to find a crew setting a light metal draining roof edge flashing dry on a base sheet, then running the roof plies onto it. No mastic, no primer, and no conformance to the manufacturers specifications.

A dozen years of experience has taught us that the best contractors do not need third party observers overseeing their work. Their own quality control, through selection and training of their foremen and superintendents, their record-keeping and the restricted list of manufacturers whose

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# Quality Control

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products they will install makes most third party observation redundant.

The essence of *observer* work is not the keeping of records. That is the second most important task. The essence of the work is the swift resolution of problems of any type. Whether it is the development of a construction detail that was overlooked in the specifications, or a decision as to whether or not a seam needs to be rewelded, or a question of the quality of interply asphalt, the *observers* duty to both the roofing contractor and the client is to resolve the question as soon as it is raised, in consensus with the manufacturer of the material if necessary and within the same working day if at all possible. The observer is a member of a team that includes the building owner, the general contractor, the material manufacturer and the roofing contractor. He is not GOD and it is not reasonable for him to question on Thursday, work which was done on Monday.

In most instances, the observer's records serve to protect both the roofing contractor and the owner in case of roof failure where a warranty is in effect and pressure may need to be applied on a manufacturer to honor the warranty.

The observers record-keeping system should be matched to the type of roof being installed. Listed below are items of information that we believe should be recorded daily.

- The location on the roof where work is being performed.
- Crew size and makeup (foreman, journeyman, apprentices).
- Types of work being performed at different times of the day, and quantities of each type of work completed.
- Weather conditions, particularly changes that occur during the day.
  - a. sun/ clouds/ fog/ rain/ snow/ hail.
  - b. wind speed and direction.
  - c. temperature.

d. condensation of dew on roof or deck.

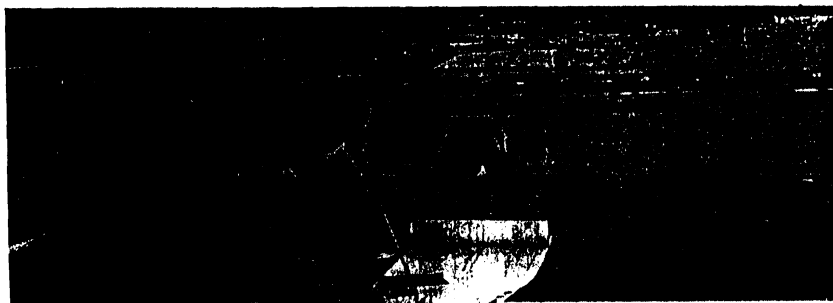
e. for single ply or foam roofing work, the relative humidity in the morning, noon and afternoon.

- Bitumen temperatures, hourly, both on the ground and on the roof. Also quantities used.
- Results of seaming inspections or tests.
- Moisture content, if any, of material.
- All problems encountered and the way they were solved.
- Notes of any roof top meetings between the owners, general contractor, roofing contractor, sheet metal contractor or others involved in the work.

Absolutely, there are times when a good observer person can be an asset and protection for you: when doing waterproofing deep below grade, for

*The observer is a member of a team that includes the building owner, the general contractor, the material manufacturer and the roofing contractor.*

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example. And be sure he is on site during the backfilling operation. Or when installing an unfamiliar roofing system for the first time, or when you suspect that the roof that the client wants may not be suitable for the service (some insulated, heated structures out in the Mojave come immediately to mind, as does a detergent plant in Sacramento), or when you have to install single ply roofing under adverse conditions: rain, fog, wind, cold, blowing dust, contaminants from a manufacturing process within the building, etc.

The observers only other purpose in life is to act as the owners *enforcer* on those projects where the owner has solicited bids from your lesser competitors rather than your peers, and is perhaps looking to get a little more than he paid for. This is not such a bad thing either: your competition will be out of your hair for a while and his bids will be higher in the future.

So who needs a third party observer? At times we all do. At times no one does. As with everything else in business, its a question of judgement and common sense.