

Reciprocation

By George Porter

The HUD code is the same building code all over the nation. In fact it is a preemptive code; this means that whenever it is in conflict with a local building code, the HUD code is the one to follow. No local building code can change the HUD code and it is a good thing because it would be chopped into a thousand little pieces by every local government trying to “customize” it to their traditions, whims, liking, or current practices. After the local building officials got done with it there would not be a factory that could build a home the same way twice. If they wanted to sell a home in each of these towns then they would have to build it the way the town likes it. This would be a production nightmare causing the cost to skyrocket and sales to drop like a rock.

None of this can happen though because local officials are forbidden by the federal government to alter the present HUD code. Having this protection is one of the reasons our homes are so affordable, we can build them anywhere no matter where they eventually go as long as we fit the roof, wind, and thermal regulations for the region they go to. There are only three types of each of these so it is not too much of a burden and for the most part they make sense. If a home is going in the north where it is cold then it needs a higher thermal rating to keep it warm and a greater capacity to hold weight on the roof because of the heavy snows. If it is going in a hurricane prone area then it should be able to withstand the winds there.

These simple requirements cover the country and are exempt from political borders such as state and/or county boundary lines. It enables us to do interstate transactions free from the rules of some local official. This means that manufacturing companies have been able to start factories nationwide because the rules for building the product are the same everywhere. Employees are fairly interchangeable with little or no training because if you can set walls in factory “X” you can probably set walls in factory “Y”. This uniformity creates a very good labor pool that greatly contributes to the quality of the home as well as the ability to make it affordable to the public.

All things considered, home manufacturing is running fairly well because of having one national building code to deal with, but what about installation?

Installation laws are about to unravel the simplicity and possibly the affordability of our product. What is the good of having one national building code when the last and very necessary step to providing a home to a customer is divided thousands of ways. When a state takes charge of the installation industry (the original plan in the HUD Code by the way) it makes laws that suite the practices of that state or in some cases, invent a whole new way of doing things. If it is a big state then the laws will cover lots of homes however every state but two border other states. We are mostly an industry of nationwide or at least large regional companies. In states with no set-up regulations or enforcement, contractors have no concern for state or county lines because the rules are all the same, there are none. Most of the nation was this way 10 years ago and while set-up certainly had it’s problems, following rules was not one of them.

Now there is a large movement to make rules about the installation of our homes and I fear we are about to cause ourselves more trouble. How many states and/or counties do you know that have a reciprocal agreements about licensing? This means that if you have a license to set homes in one state then the state next door will honor that license and not make you attend their certification program to get a license there. As of this date there are only two, Illinois and Kentucky. As far as I know they are the only ones to ever plan for such an agreement and work toward it. Can you imagine what it means to the dealers and set-up contractors in both states to not have to participate in two separate programs at the same time? Besides the expense there is the matter of time and travel to stay current. If you are a licensed installer in Illinois then show that license and for \$50 you are licensed in Kentucky or the other way around as well. The farther away from this idea the industry gets, the harder and more costly it will be to do business in a region. There are several regions in the south and east that have areas of 4 to 6 states in a 150 mile radius or less. It would be nearly a full time job just maintaining a license in all of them if they didn't have some sort of reciprocal agreement. One state official recently told me that he would be glad to reciprocate with any state as long as they were exactly like his. Apparently lots of other states feel the same way but they are not planning to change their rules either so nothing happens. The states lose nothing by this policy but the industry sure does. We need more than just installation laws, we need nationwide planning or we will be solving one problem and creating another at the same time.