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Human Faces

"Getting There' with NWTFA" by Melinda Caldwell

For most component manufacturers, solving problems with production, personnel and materials are so much of a focus, that the difficulties that can arise once an order of trusses has been produced and is ready to leave the plant aren't even considered. Until recently, however, component manufacturers in Washington State faced delivery problems on an almost daily basis.

Due to the Washington State Department of Transportation's (DOT) stringent requirements on the total length and width of a load of trusses as well as the required classification of the delivery equipment itself, manufacturers were dealing with frequent permit revocations and other delivery headaches. One section of the code prohibited a delivery from exceeding a maximum length of 75 feet when using a truck/trailer combination, and another area of the code prohibited manufacturers from loading additional legal size trusses within the load envelope of oversize trusses. In some cases, these

requirements made it necessary for manufacturers to use two trucks to deliver a shipment that in many other places in the country is safely delivered with only one truck. In other cases, it was necessary to hire or have tractor/trailer combinations to haul long trusses.

In January of 1999, the Northwest Truss Fabricators Association (NWTFA), a local chapter of WTCA, decided to join forces and take a proactive approach to changing the requirement that was making it difficult to do business. They started by inviting representatives from the DOT to a chapter meeting. This gave the chapter a forum in which to explain how the code was negatively affecting component manufacturers and to outline what changes would improve the situation without impacting the safety of truss deliveries. The primary focus was to change the requirements to allow longer loads on the highways using primarily the standard truck/trailer combination of equipment and to redefine the definition of the load envelope when oversized trusses are involved.

NWTFA formed a committee within the chapter to work on the new requirement. The committee included Ed Hawkinson of Woodinville Lumber, Dwight Holmgren of Tri-County Truss and Jack



Louws of Louws Truss. The group developed the necessary code changes from the component manufacturer's perspective and then traveled to Olympia for three or four meetings with the DOT to hammer out a new code that proved satisfactory to all involved. During that time, Barry Diseth toured the Woodinville Lumber production facility to see first hand the product mix that is being fabricated and delivered; and Pam Hugley went on a truss delivery with Dwight to experience first hand the complexities of loading and hauling roof trusses. Barry and Pam were the committee's contacts within the DOT and they were instrumental in helping with the code changes. In the process, these members of NWTFA developed a positive working relationship with the DOT that will benefit the component industry in the Northwest for years to come.

Approximately a year and a half after NWTFA began its campaign on this issue the chapter's hard work was rewarded with a newly revised code (WAC 468-38-070). The revision of the code clarifies misinterpretations from the prior code and is more applicable to the hauling of wood trusses. The most notable changes allow: (1) "an unladen truck to be classified as a tractor and to legally pull a trailer of 53 feet," (2) "a truck and trailer both to be loaded as long as the combined length with load does not exceed 85 feet," and (3) "the largest oversize piece to be loaded to its practical minimum, permitting other pieces to be loaded within the rectangular envelope of the largest piece, outside of the standard trailer size."

The code revision has provided a number of benefits for component manufacturers in Washington State, above and beyond simply making product delivery an easier process. The reclassification of the equipment used for delivery made it possible for small component manufacturers to keep their current delivery equipment rather than having to spend a fortune to replace it to be in compliance with the old requirements. The length extension revision has made it possible to safely transport with one truck the load that required two trucks under the old code. Component manufacturers estimate that their trucks are on the road 15 percent less than before the code change, cutting down on congestion and increasing the efficiency of the delivery process.

While chapter members had to devote a lot of time and energy to this code revision, NWTFA President Jack Louws believes it was well worth the effort. "On an individual basis, we were getting nowhere with this issue," Louws recalls. "It was a frustrating situation that was only resulting in an antagonistic relationship between the DOT and any component manufacturer that ran into a delivery problem. But when the chapter went to the DOT as a united front, with the goal of solving the problem in a positive way, the whole environment changed. We were able to come to the table and work through our issues in a way that created a positive working relationship with the DOT and resulted in a regulation that makes doing business much easier for component manufacturers in Washington."

[SBC HOME PAGE](#)

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