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SCDA Update

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Association Provides Value for EWP Industry by SBC Staff

For one component manufacturer, membership in both SCDA and WTCA is the only way to go.

In May 2003, SCDA staff had a discussion with Don Groom, V.P. Operations of Stark Truss Company, regarding membership in the Structural Components Distributors Association. Below are a few of our questions along with Don's responses:

Already being a member of WTCA, what initially brought Stark's attention to SCDA? Stark Truss

Company manufactures I-Joists and distributes I-Joists and LVL and related engineered wood products. When the SCDA concept was first being discussed, we initially thought that WTCA was already working on the items needed by potential SCDA members. The initial SCDA formation meeting changed our mind on the value of the underlying SCDA concepts, based on the great discussions we had with other EWP distributors. We are convinced that SCDA can have the same positive impact on the distribution business that WTCA has had with truss and wall panel manufacturing. These are two distinctly different market segments and the focus of SCDA is needed to provide work that no one distributor of these products is likely to do themselves. Additionally, SCDA has value because the work is done as an association rather than proprietarily, so there is more of a consensus, arms-length approach that is also very beneficial to all involved in it.

So, you find value in both memberships—WTCA and SCDA? WTCA offers many valuable products and services for companies in the metal plate connected wood truss and wall panel industry. That is fine if you only deal in wood trusses. SCDA was formed because of the significant need

Years in the Industry	Math Skills Predicted by Manager	Math Skills	Terminology Predicted by Manager	Terminology	Wood Science Predicted by Manager	Wood Science	Codes & Standards Predicted by Manager	Codes & Standards	Load Development Predicted by Manager	Load Development	Product Selection Predicted by Manager	Product Selection	Blue-Print Reading Predicted by Manager	Blue-Print Reading	Field Application Predicted by Manager	Field Application
1	8	9	5	9	3	7	4	4	3	6	5	9	6	8	6	7
3	4	8	8	8	2	7	7	5	6	6	8	8	8	7	7	8
4	5	6	7	8	6	4	6	3	8	5	8	9	9	7	7	6
4	4	5	7	8	4	8	5	6	6	6	7	8	7	9	7	7
4	4	4	4	7	3	5	4	4	6	5	6	8	7	5	6	7
6	7	4	8	7	7	5	7	4	9	2	7	8	9	3	8	7
7	8	9	9	9	8	8	7	5	6	7	8	9	8	10	7	8
9	8	8	7	8	7	5	8	4	9	6	8	8	9	7	5	3
10	5	8	8	8	7	8	8	8	7	6	8	8	7	8	8	5
17	8	7	7	9	5	7	6	7	8	7	8	9	8	9	8	9

RANDOM SAMPE OF SCDA BOARD MEMBERS' RANKINGS AND ACTUAL EMPLOYEE SCORES
CLICK ON IMAGE FOR LARGER VIEW

for technical training in the engineered wood products industry. SCDA training is specific to I-Joists, Glulam, LVL, PSL and related engineered wood products. If you are a component manufacturer that only builds trusses, WTCA's Truss Technician Training (TTT) program is generally all you need to be involved with to meet your employee technical training needs.

However, many truss manufacturers also distribute engineered wood products. For instance, we have several full-time technicians that concentrate strictly on our engineered wood products business. Many others are involved in both EWP products and trusses. Since we are involved in both programs, we see great value in each. We need to know what the skill sets are for both the truss and EWP work we are doing. The TTT and SCDA certification programs allow us to accurately evaluate skill sets and focus our training in areas of specific need. It has also brought value to us as a training development aid.

How does SCDA's technical training process work? The Technical Skills Evaluation (TSE) is a comprehensive examination that consists of 145 questions presented in eight sections: (1) Math Skills, (2) Terminology, (3) Wood Science, (4) Codes and Standards, (5) Load Development, (6) Product Selection, (7) Blue-Print Reading and (8) Field Applications. Based on those that have taken the exam, it ranges from four to eight hours to complete, but the results are extremely valuable. To give you an example of just how valuable, as part of the development process, the SCDA Board decided that it would ask the managers to predict the scores of the technical staff taking the TSE. Random samples of SCDA Board member's rankings and actual employee scores can be found in the chart above.

With the results, a manager can not only compare employees' knowledge to each other, but may also compare them with others in the industry. More importantly is the fact that the scoring system allows us to define where the employee's skill set is strong and weak. We can adjust work activities to focus on their strong areas and also provide additional training to strengthen the weak areas. This really helps us to take full advantage of our staff and a by-product is better morale because the work being done fits better with employee knowledge.

Most of your staff are certified truss technicians—some up to Level III. Is the SCDA Technical Skills Evaluation (TSE) useful to those that are certified in WTCA's training? If you design, manufacture or distribute engineered products then the answer is a definite YES. There is some crossover between what is taught in TTT and what is tested in the TSE, but overall the TSE evaluates knowledge specific to engineered wood products in a very valuable way.

For me, it answered the question, "Where does our staff fall with respect to the knowledge that the SCDA Board feels is fundamentally needed to be technically proficient in dealing with EWP issues?"

How do you respond to those in the industry that say job-specific training is too costly? It is hard to put a price on high employee morale and low job dissatisfaction. The TSE process allows us to build high efficiency, productivity and morale, because employees feel like you are investing in them when they receive training.

Beyond this, one compelling reason for undertaking training is to limit company liability. We

have just gone through our insurance negotiating cycle. We found that being involved with and using the Jobsite Safety Package, TTT and In-Plant WTCA QC certification that WTCA provides and SCDA's TSE certification programs along with our good claims record really impressed our insurance agent and underwriter. They were impressed to the point of reducing our insurance premiums by 30 percent for 2003.

We believe in technical training and quality assurance and think that you can either pay for training or pay higher insurance rates. From our standpoint, we can control training and its costs; we have absolutely no control over the whims of the insurance industry and our insurance premiums. In other words, we believe it is a managed risk up front or pay the price later with higher risk and higher insurance rates.

There is another important consideration—ask yourself how the engineering and building official community views our industry. In many cases, it is not as favorably as we all would like it to be. With the programs WTCA and SCDA have put in place we have the ability to show them that we are systematically tending to the technical training needs of our employees on fundamental engineering concepts. This has had a tremendous positive effect on our image as we interact with these groups and the more that the certification process is known and understood, the more benefits we will derive from being involved.

How do you envision SCDA in a few years? Those who have been around this industry for any period of time will remember that WTCA was essentially without money and floundering a little over ten years ago. All one has to do to see the value of a group of companies getting together to define key industry needs, prioritize them, fund the work and then complete the tasks required, is to look at where WTCA is now. SCDA has the opportunity to do the same thing and has the benefit of being able to use the vast experience that WTCA has to do it more effectively and efficiently.

Often in the past WTCA was reacting to problems. SCDA has the advantage in having the ability to be proactive. Our goal with SCDA has to be to build on the success of the TSE and begin to develop and offer online training and certification courses, jobsite safety education packages specific to the EWP industry and related industry tasks that emerge as important to SCDA members.

Do you think SCDA is worthy of support by current WTCA Members? Yes, and it is my strong opinion that those WTCA members that distribute EWPs would derive great value from the TSE and investing in the future of SCDA. With strong support, all in the EWP industry will derive solid WTCA-like benefits and it is certain that it can be done more efficiently because it has been done once before.

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