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TPI & WTCA Work Results in ICC Code Change by Libby (Maurer) Walters

“The winning team has a dedication. It will have a core of veteran players who set the standards. They will not accept defeat.” —Merlin Olsen

Members of the structural building components industry heard favorable decisions from the International Code Council (ICC) at the 2004 Final Action Hearings in Overland Park, Kansas on May 18. Dave Brakeman, Steve Cabler, Charlie Goehring and Kirk Grundahl attended the hearings, rallying on behalf of the Wood Truss Council of America (WTCA) and Truss Plate Institute (TPI) membership.

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The WTCA and TPI group aligned themselves with other industry groups in the background on each code change. Those working with them included AF&PA American Wood Council staff Dave Tyree, Dennis Pitts and Paul Coates; Allen Zepper, code official from Minnesota; Phil Brazil; Reid Middleton; and Ed Houston representing the National Council of Structural Engineers Association (NCSEA).

Among hundreds of other proposed code changes scheduled to be heard during the week-long session, committee panels at the Final Action Hearings considered two code change proposals of critical importance to the building components industry.

The most significant code change proposal, S14-03/04 (International Building Code—Structural), also posed the greatest challenge for the WTCA/TPI group. The group first submitted the proposal on minimum attic live loads for IBC and IRC consideration during the last set of hearings eighteen months ago. The proposal was accepted by the IRC Building/Energy Code Development Committee but defeated by the IBC Structural Committee. The IBC Structural committee approved of the concepts in the proposal, but questioned how the wording could be applied.

The group had to reverse the IBC Structural committee's original disapproval by majority floor vote of those attending the hearing and then get a modification to the first code proposal approved by two-thirds majority. The process went as smoothly as the industry could hope for. This change is significant for component manufacturers as it mimics the former BOCA code approach to the application of live loads in truss attic spaces and will save the industry a great deal of money when compared to the existing IBC provision. Also, now the IBC attic loading provisions are consistent with the action taken by the IRC committee.

Dave Brakeman said of the process, “[It] is intended to be a representative democratic one, and

that is exactly what we experienced at the May hearings. Our industry associations did their homework to write a code provision that everyone could agree to and also worked to assure that there would be broad based supporting testimony at the hearings. The result was that there was no testimony against our proposal and the vote by the ICC members was overwhelmingly for it. The process worked!"

The second proposal, RB151-03/04 (International Residence Code—Building & Energy), was a code change that would have required labeling of trusses through the addition of the following code language: "Each truss shall be labeled on the underside of the bottom chord between the outside bearing point and the center of each truss with the identifying label from the truss design drawings." The industry group's goal was to affirm the IRC Building/Energy Code Development Committee's committee disapproval of this change which was the outcome at the hearing. Industry members Cabler and Grundahl provided testimony that supported the approach that ASNI/TPI 1 already takes regarding this issue.

Steve Cabler remarked that the united industry effort paid off in the end: "The code hearings went very well. With a coordinated team effort, we were successful in achieving the outcome planned. These hearings can be unpredictable and broad support of a position is critical in getting the votes needed. WTCA did a wonderful job of lining up industry support and, in the end, this is what put us over the top. Solid relationships with building officials, structural engineers and related industry associations were a huge benefit to us in the hearings and will continue to pay dividends for our industry in the future."

Paul Coats, Midwest Regional Manager of the American Forest & Paper Association also commented on the teamwork involved, "This is a good example of how industry groups can work together to improve the code to address specific industry needs."

In response to a recent Board Report, Rip Rogers of Truss-way, Ltd. thanked the group for their work on behalf of the WTCA membership, noting that a united voice for the industry is more influential than that of a single company: "So many things that WTCA accomplishes on behalf of the industry would not be possible if a single company tried to get them done. [The recent ICC code changes] are just one more example of how they are working to protect the members' interests. Our influence and our voice are being recognized through a lot of hard work by people who did their homework and presented our case."

The code change effort captured a true team effort in which everyone had a role to play and each group played that role highly professionally.

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