



**WTCA**<sup>TM</sup>  
 Northeast Chapter

*Unites over Building Labeling Legislation in Maine*

by Melanie Birkeland

Teamwork prevailed as one chapter fought to defeat a potentially destructive bill in Maine.

**W**hen the old and recurring issue of building labeling for the fire service recently arose in Maine, it was met with a united front. The Northeast Chapter (WTCA-NE) and WTCA staff have been working together as a team for many months on the issue in the New England marketplace.

George Sprowl of Sprowl Building Components Inc., Searsmont, ME, got the ball rolling by calling WTCA staff to let them know about Maine Bill 1879, "An Act to Enhance Firefighter Safety," scheduled to be considered by the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee on January 23. George realized that the bill proposed to label all commercial buildings containing wood truss construction, so he acted quickly to get the word out.

In short order, WTCA staff began calling chapter members in concert with WTCA-NE President John Goodrich of Truss Engineering Corp, Indian Orchard, MA, to inform them of the proposed legislation and to find volunteers to attend the hearing, making sure that our industry's voice and policies would be heard in the midst of this legislative process.

Staff and John asked for help from the members of WTCA-NE. Josh Bartlett of Wood Structures in Biddeford, ME and Rick Dube from Mainely Truss in Fairfield, ME responded to represent the chapter and industry at the committee hearing. Along with WTCA staff, the chapter members began formulating thoughts, ideas and arguments to present at the hearing. The team also put together a package of educational materials that included:

- *Wood Truss Construction and Fire Performance* CD produced by the Carbeck Structural Component Institute (CSCI)
- A CSCI brochure
- A reprint of the January/February *SBC Magazine* article, "Education & Awareness Leads to 'Truss Truce'"
- Firefighter statistics from the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB)

The package was to be given to all committee members. The WTCA-NE/WTCA team's goal was to educate the committee on the best facts that we have available to us regarding the fire and structural performance of trusses and work toward dispelling any misconceptions there may be.

When wood truss construction is singled out as the only type of construction that needs to be labeled or highlighted, the result can be harmful for both the fire service and component manufacturers. Because of myth-based implications on truss construction, labeling can provide the fire service with a false sense of security because they may view unlabeled buildings as being safer to enter when it is really the building's contents that cause true life-safety hazards. ME Bill 1879 was presented to the committee as a firefighter safety proposal, implying that firefighters need to be warned any time they enter a building framed with trusses in commercial structures.

Based on solid preparation, Josh began the argument at the hearing by stating, "For every regulation and statute, there are consequences. Some intended, some not." He explained the fact that wood trusses are used in more than half of all new structures being built in Maine, and that passing this bill would result in less affordable construction, since the building codes in the area are difficult to meet without using structural building component products. He also brought to light that the structural building components industry provides local jobs and pointed out that if our industry was threatened, local jobs would also be threatened. He drove home the message that the industry takes firefighter safety very seriously, but that the facts just aren't there to prove that truss construction is more harmful to firefighters than any other structural framing member. "This bill will put a 'scarlet letter' on any building with trusses," Josh said, and WTCA's policy is that if building labels are legislated in a given area, firefighters would be much safer if every building was appropriately labeled.

During the committee hearing, several panel members referenced the NIOSH report, a document that WTCA was involved in providing feedback and draft reviews. The NIOSH report is the first report on the topic of fire performance of trusses that has listed the contributions of Frank Brannigan

and Vincent Dunn, while also treating wood trusses fairly. This report integrates WTCA's facts and policies and WTCA is referenced appropriately. (For more information on the NIOSH report or fire-related issues visit [www.carbeck.org](http://www.carbeck.org).)

At the next WTCA-NE meeting, the chapter reviewed the details of the committee hearing and discussed the upcoming meeting scheduled with the Fire Chief's Association of Maine. Not long after the two meetings took place, a work session was held in Augusta, ME on February 10. John volunteered to accompany Josh to the work session where they were able to act as the WTCA team's voice. In preparation for the hearing, John, Josh and staff held several teleconfer-

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## Policy Regarding Building Labeling

Committee: Legislative

WTCA supports making a positive effort to promote universal building labeling of ALL types of construction to help the fire service in early size-up identification of a building on fire on the fire ground.

WTCA supports making a positive effort to promote universal building labeling, provided that the law as written does not discriminate against wood truss, related engineered wood construction, or any other form of construction. In other words, all structural elements, whether wood, steel or concrete based, that are used in building construction should be labeled in a systematic and quickly understandable manner.

WTCA will support legislation, provided that WTCA is involved in writing the bill and in the legislative process ensuring that the law is applied uniformly to all building types.

Computerized Pre-Fire Planning is WTCA's preference over building labeling within cities and communities. This type of program would create a database on each building and the summary pre-fire plan would be able to be downloaded to the fire chief on the way to a fire for use in developing fire ground tactics. WTCA understands that this type of technology is not readily available to all fire jurisdictions, so in those cases labeling might be the preferred method.

WTCA will advocate and support the development of computerized pre-fire planning programs as the best method for pre-fire planning. The truss industry can facilitate this with its expertise in construction industry computer technology.

For more information on pre-fire planning and an example of language WTCA would find acceptable for building labeling visit [Support Docs](#) at [www.sbcmag.info](http://www.sbcmag.info).

## WTCA-NE Unites over Building Labeling...

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ences to solidify a proactive and united industry approach to help defeat or modify the direction of the bill. John explains the value of working as a team by saying, "It was very helpful to have a conference call before the meeting simply to ensure that all attending the work session were on the same page. The last thing you want is to be representing the industry and not appear to be organized and professional." John and Josh said that they felt more prepared for the work session by simply touching base with the staff to get perspective on these issues and to have a venue to build off of each others points of view, to formulate a common sense approach.

The work session was a huge success and contributed to the final outcome of the Maine Legislature dropping the bill indefinitely. Through the dedication of the WTCA-NE/WTCA team, our voice as an industry was heard, and it was heard loud and clear!

Even so, this was not the only battle for the Northeast Chapter. A similar bill, like several in the past, has been introduced again in the Massachusetts legislature.

Building labeling is an issue that may continue to resurface, but teamwork and effective communication allows us to communicate about and hopefully change the false perceptions of our products and industry. To that end, the connection between local chapters and WTCA staff is of critical importance to ensure the vast resources of our entire association are being utilized.

Because each state reacts differently to bill proposals about firefighter safety and building labeling, it is important to be sensitive to each situation as it surfaces. As proposals emerge, they need to be treated with a level of understanding within the local area in which they are presented. Each proposal is complex and requires customized solutions using the knowledge that the industry has acquired over the years.

While more and more local chapters adopt the view of keeping their "eyes on the ground," and monitoring their local issues, staff will continue to help support and solidify forward progress for them and our industry as a whole. By communicating locally and with staff, we can ensure more victories like this in the future. "The first step in strengthening our presence is by acting locally. Local chapter members need to monitor their local issues so that other chapter members can draw from their experiences when a similar bill is proposed in their area. It will then ultimately give us the most strength and power for proactive action," John explains as he reflects back on the experience of the hearing, the meetings, and the work session. Each time we work together and each time we prevail, we will continue to strengthen our position in the marketplace. **SBC**



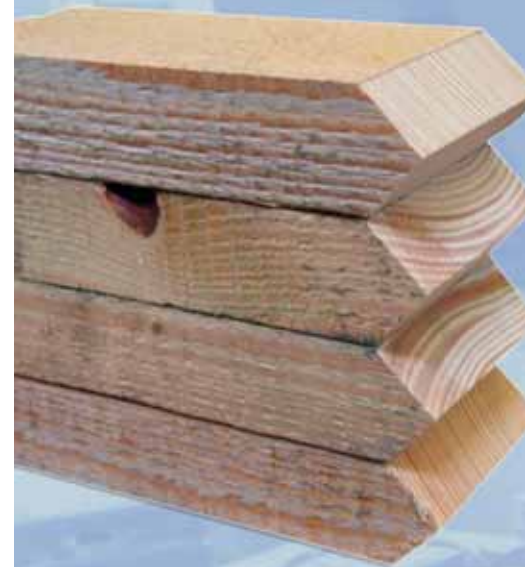
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**Qua·dru·ple:** kwä-'drü-pel

*verb*

To make **four** times as great or as many

*intransitive:* **To become four times as great!**



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