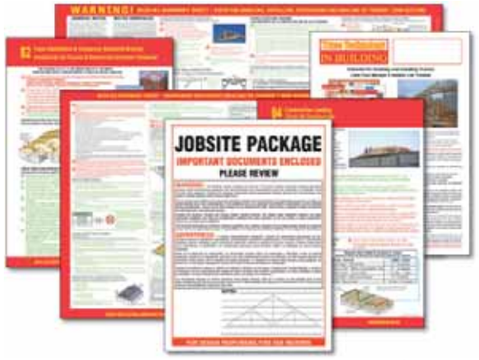
THE JOBSITE PACKAGE:
A Critical Picket in Your Fence of Protection

by Kent J. Pagel

Protect yourself with the WTCA JOBSITE PACKAGE.

In August 2003, Steve Yoder wrote an article in ***SBC*** on the need for component manufacturers to "[Build] a Fence of Protection Around" their companies. He then described how as president, he and his team had done this for Stark Truss Company. The "protection" Steve viewed as necessary was due to the ever increasing frequency and severity of claims asserted against Stark even when the company had done nothing wrong. The "fence" signified Stark's proactive approach to quality, professionalism and risk management. The pickets of the fence were comprised of various industry and company programs Stark had in place, including those available from WTCA.



I believe the Stark Truss metaphor very much applies to this industry five years later. In the litigation situations that we see, many component manufacturer companies are simply not doing enough to protect against the everyday risks they face. In this article I will discuss one very important part of the fence of protection—the jobsite package. Aside from a carefully prepared or negotiated customer contract, which is extremely important, a properly assembled jobsite package and the ability to document that it was duly received by your customer and the truss erector, is the one risk management practice that, in my opinion, best serves the component manufacturer.

In Figure 1, I have identified three Case Break examples involving truss collapses where the collapse may never had occurred if jobsite packages been provided, and the component manufacturer would have been able to successfully defend the claim.

What should be eye-opening is the fact that the first two Case Break examples actually occurred. The third example is a hypothetical, but the manufacturer's conduct is alarmingly common. I firmly believe it is time for these manufacturers to think in terms of "If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always gotten." It's time to think about assembling part of the fence that Steve Yoder referred to five years ago.

Here is what the collective structural component industry experience has shown. Truss performance depends not only on proper design and fabrication, but also installation vertically, in-plane, and at specific spacing, and braced properly. Through experience and data, we further know that a majority of accidents involving trusses and components occur because of mistakes made with regard to installation and bracing. After the customer contract is signed, the component manufacturer's liability largely begins once product leaves the plant.

While it would seem a truss collapse lawsuit against a component manufacturer would be easily defended if the manufacturer could prove the direct cause of the accident was either improper installation or bracing, unfortunately that result is not typical. Juries like construction claimants! Why? The claimant has usually been a hard worker all of his life, is often a family man, may have children under the age of 18, and usually has no other employment training and the injury may mean their trade career could be over. Juries furthermore expect and demand that genuine warnings and instructions

at a glance

- ❑ Several years ago, a component manufacturer invented a fence of protection made up of WTCA programs designed to lower its risk.
- ❑ A manufacturer's liability does not end when the product leaves the plant.
- ❑ Protecting your company against jobsite risk is possible with the use of the WTCA JOBSITE PACKAGE.

case break: A roof truss erector fell three stories to the ground and sustained serious injuries when walls of a building gave way causing the trusses to topple. The Mid-Atlantic component manufacturer was criticized for failing to provide adequate warnings about bracing. The manufacturer was unable to convince the jury that a suitable jobsite package had been provided and the jury found the manufacturer's failure to warn was the cause of the accident, and thus the manufacturer was responsible for the roof truss erector's injuries.

case break: Roof trusses erected on a church in the Midwest collapsed during construction and seriously injured two bystanders. Engineering experts concluded the collapse was attributable to inadequate top chord, bottom chord and diagonal bracing. The component manufacturer was sued for failure:

- to advise of the proper manner of handling, erecting and bracing trusses,
- to advise of the hazards associated with trusses, and
- to provide industry custom guidelines readily available from the Truss Plate Institute at the time (the incident occurred prior to the creation of BCSI).

The testimony developed through discovery demonstrated that:

- the contractor had asked the manufacturer how to brace the trusses and no information was provided,
- years earlier, the truss plant manager informed plant employees to attach HIB-91 to each order of trusses—yet no written documentation or procedures existed nor was there any validation process to verify the task was done,
- no employee of the manufacturer testified that it was their responsibility to attach HIB-91 to the trusses,
- none of the truss erectors recalled seeing the HIB-91 documentation attached to the trusses. The manufacturer's insurance carrier settled each of the two claims for a high six figure amount.

case break: A jobsite laborer sustained serious injuries resulting from a truss collapse. At the time of the accident the component manufacturer's management deemed it not necessary to provide any type of guidelines or instructions with the delivery of trusses. They viewed such matters as the erector's responsibility. The allegations in the complaint filed by the injured laborer asserted the injury-causing incident was a direct result of the negligence and carelessness of the manufacturer from failing to:

- advise of the proper manner of handing, erecting and bracing the trusses,
- provide the erector and/or general contractor with industry guidelines regarding handling, installing and bracing,
- warn of the hazards associated with the trusses.

Figure 1.

be provided by all variety of product manufacturers and service providers.

Forget for a moment that providing a jobsite package may prevent a collapse. When a collapse does occur and the manufacturer can demonstrate that it provided installation and bracing guidelines to the jobsite and that such documentation was received, the resulting lawsuit against a component manufacturer is far more easily defended. If such guidelines or instructions had been provided in the examples above, perhaps the component manufacturer would not have been sued and if sued, the claim would have been far more easily defended.

One effective way to provide documentation to the jobsite is through the use of WTCA's JOBSITE PACKAGE. Each JOBSITE PACKAGE contains:

- A Cover Sheet containing English/Spanish warnings on the front and excerpts from the ANSI/TPI 1-2002 design responsibilities section on the back
- The TTB Checklist for Handling and Installing Trusses
- B1 - Guide for Handling, Installing, Restraint & Bracing of Trusses

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The Jobsite Package...

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- B2 - Truss Installation & Temporary Restraint/Bracing
- B3 - Web Member Permanent Bracing/Web Reinforcement
- B4 - Construction Loading

These single sheets are easy to understand, easy to use, inexpensive and have a great deal of credibility as they have been included in *Building Component Safety Information, BCSI 2006 Guide to Good Practice for Handling, Installing, Restraining & Bracing of Metal Plate Connected Wood Trusses,* produced jointly by WTCA and TPI.

The structural components industry has done a good job preparing state-of-the-art materials that set out how to effectively handle, install and brace trusses. It only makes sense for component manufacturers to work hard to make sure that these materials reach the erectors. Does it not go without saying that component manufacturers should provide adequate warnings and instructions with respect to the use of the products they manufacture and otherwise supply? For some of us this means reviewing and focusing on the job we are doing at warning, instructing and educating; for others this means beginning something that we might not have done in the past.

In summary, consider the following as reasons why providing genuine warnings and instructions is incumbent on the component manufacturer:

REASON: A jobsite package may very well prevent a truss collapse from occurring!

REASON: The jobsite package is geared entirely at the persons who handle, store, erect and brace structural components. As such, it is important that these persons be provided guidelines and other solid information relating to safe and proper use of trusses and components.

REASON: It is good risk management to provide industry-based guidelines and documentation to help your customers intelligently handle, store, brace and install the products you manufacture and sell.

REASON: History has provided the industry and individual companies with sufficient notice that we must all act proactively to warn, instruct and educate. Component manufacturers are often wrongly accused of having done something wrong and it has become a reflex reaction for them to be named in each lawsuit where trusses hit the ground during or after erection. Thus, component manufacturers should take appropriate steps to warn, instruct and educate. SBC

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