

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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NEWS FROM WTCA:

Press Release: NAHB Fire Resolution Unites Industry Organizations

At its 1999 Spring Board meeting in May, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) published a document entitled NAHB Resolution on Restrictions and Bans on Wood Trusses and I-joists. This resolution is an important step in uniting allied industry organizations to work toward greater public understanding of the economic and environmental benefits of using metal plate connected wood trusses, I-joists and other manufactured wood components, and to oppose the restriction or banning of these products due to misunderstanding of their performance characteristics under the siege of fire. Included in this joint effort are the Wood Truss Council of America (WTCA), the Wood I-Joist Manufacturers Association (WIJMA), the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), APA—The Engineered Wood Association and other concerned parties.

Jeff Inks, Director of the Construction Standards Department at NAHB, provided the big picture focus of the resolution. He stated, "NAHB opposes restrictions on residential building components that are designed, manufactured and used in accordance with nationally recognized building standards and codes—particularly when those components are widely used and help keep housing affordable. That is what this issue is about and that is why NAHB is lending cooperative support to deal with it."

Over the last 15 years, a variety of legislative acts prohibiting or restricting wood trusses and I-joists have been proposed, and in some cases, made law at the local and state level. In response, WTCA, WIJMA and AF&PA's American Wood Council (AWC) began aggressively working toward protecting the wood component industry from unfair legislation. New Jersey and Illinois, in particular, have been active in placing restrictions on wood component construction, including requiring a placard to be posted on buildings that were erected with wood trusses. Similar bans and restrictions have also been proposed in New York, Maine and Connecticut. The majority of these bills have failed to become law, due in large part to the lack of a technical basis for the action to be taken, coupled with the work of these industry associations to bring technical information to the table for thorough consideration.

The justification for these restrictions is frequently based on subjective and non-technical comparisons to the fire performance of other products. This type of legislation tends to stem from the 12 fire fighter deaths (that we are aware of that are attributed to poor performance of wood trusses) during the 16-year period from 1980 to 1996, and the sadness everyone feels over this loss of life. This emotion carries over to an under-current throughout the fire service that wood trusses kill firefighters, even though a closer look at this issue proves otherwise.

A 1998 study by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) concluded that training and preparation are the most critical elements among those that contributed to fire fighter deaths over the last three decades. Building construction was not among any of the elements cited. In the July 1999 issue of *Fire Engineering*, Francis L. Brannigan, SFPE (Fellow), writes the following in an article entitled "The Ol' Professor": "I am of the opinion that part of the responsibility for such disasters lies in the way firefighters are trained. . . . The emphasis is on taking the punishment and putting the wet stuff on the red stuff. . . . This requires reading, studying, reviewing tapes and slides of building construction and preplanning or familiarization inspections of major buildings. There was no mention in the press reports that the fire department had ever looked at this building from what I think should be the firefighter's perspective: The building is your enemy; know your enemy."

Kirk Grundahl, P.E., Executive Director of WTCA and author of The National Fire Protection Research Foundation's *National Engineered Lightweight Construction Fire Research Project Report*, 1992, said, "I had lunch with Mr. Brannigan in 1990 and learned that his primary educational goal was to sufficiently prepare the fire service for fighting the building, which he calls the enemy. This meant to me that he intended to place emphasis on the need for the fire service to be well trained. Our industry wholeheartedly agrees with Mr. Brannigan's mission to focus on training and preplanning concepts and their ability to save fire fighter lives. We have and will support any efforts by the fire service in these areas. It is one of the reasons why one of our 13 Truss Technology Workshops focuses on the fire endurance performance of trusses."

Based on this, NAHB, WTCA, WIJMA and AF&PA's AWC are working to provide the market with the education necessary to ensure that legislative efforts do not unfairly penalize builders, and in turn consumers, for using wood components in home construction. Scott Arquilla, President of the Greater Chicagoland Truss Manufacturers Association and Vice President of Best Homes expressed his pleasure with the recent resolution and articulated the impact this document will have at the local level: "[Our] association applauds the NAHB for joining WTCA et al in the fight against the banning of the use of trusses and other engineered wood products. We hope their resources can help us further educate fire and building officials to reverse the bans some communities in the Chicago area have already implemented." The NAHB resolution, which follows in its entirety, marks a significant milestone in this endeavor. For more information on this issue, contact WTCA at 608/274-4849.

NAHB Resolution on Restrictions and Bans on Wood Trusses and I-Joists

Original Sponsor: Standing Committee on Construction Codes and Standards.

WHEREAS, the use of wood trusses and I-joists has been established as an integral component of residential construction and has lead to greater flexibility in design and the ability of home builders to better serve the needs of homebuyers;

WHEREAS, the integral use of wood trusses and I-joists in residential construction has resulted in cost savings to homebuyers making housing more affordable;

WHEREAS, the design and use of wood trusses, I-joists and engineered wood products is an environmentally responsible and efficient use of forest resources and other raw materials;

WHEREAS, nationally recognized consensus standards have been developed for the use of wood trusses and I-joists and have been adopted by reference in the model building codes;

WHEREAS, nationally recognized consensus testing standards have been established to ensure wood trusses and I-joists perform to nationally recognized safety minimums;

WHEREAS, current, nationally recognized research finds injury risk due to the structural failure of wood trusses and I-joists to be minimal;

WHEREAS, a number of states and local jurisdictions have proposed or enacted legislation restricting or banning the use of wood trusses,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the National Association of Home Builders shall work cooperatively with the American Forest and Paper Association, the Wood Truss Council of America, the Wood I-Joist Manufacturers Association, APA-The Engineered Wood Association and other concerned parties to oppose the restriction or banning of wood trusses, I-joists and engineered wood products designed, manufactured and used in accordance with nationally recognized codes and standards.

[SBC HOME PAGE](#)

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