

PHRC NEWS

PENNSTATE



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The Pennsylvania
Housing Research Center



A Publication of the Pennsylvania Housing Research Center

Review of Fifth Annual PA Housing Conference

The Fifth Annual Pennsylvania Housing Conference was held on February 19-20, 1997, at the Scanticon Conference Center in State College. About 110 people attended the conference which was jointly sponsored by the Pennsylvania Builders Association, the Pennsylvania Electrical Association, and the Pennsylvania Housing Research Center.

The keynote session on the first day was directed at the state of housing and the business of housing both in Pennsylvania and nationally. On the second day, the keynote session focused on the regulatory situation within the state. The ten working sessions dealt with topics as diverse as business problems and solutions, trends in house design, a builder software review, alternative foundation systems, mechanical systems and their effect on the performance of the house, the Susquehanna House project, and the need for a competent workforce. Two sessions were of particular interest: one was directed at the consequences of electrical utility deregulation and the other at the adoption of a state-wide building code. Both possibilities have significant implications for home builders in Pennsylvania.

Feedback suggests that the conference was successful. We did not lose money and the sessions were well received. The credit really belongs to the speakers who gave of their time and energy to participate. Joe Lstiburek proved to be not only stimulating and provocative but also a most entertaining after-dinner speaker. Thanks are also due to the PBA, in particular Marlin Gayman, and the PEA, in particular Bob Murphy, for their role in sponsoring and organizing the conference.

Planning for Pennsylvania Housing Seminar 1998

At the spring Advisory Council meeting the annual housing conference was the subject of much discussion. In attendance, finances, and impact the last

two or three meetings have been very similar. While support for these annual meetings is relatively strong, the fact is that only about 25 to 30 builders attend. Since these conferences are targeted at the home builder and as the speakers, exhibitors and the Associations all participate on behalf of the home builder, it seemed that change was needed.

It was decided at the Spring Advisory Council Meeting that we would hold a 1-day seminar/workshop on Moisture in February 1998 instead of the usual multi-topic 2-day conference. John Eastman, the PHRC representative for the PBA Northeast region, has volunteered to chair the organizing committee for the 1998 Seminar. Other members of the Advisory Council who volunteered to sit on this committee are: Ed Carr, Marlin Gayman, Scott Cannon, Bob Booz, Ed Howard, Todd Young, and Eric Burnett

Planning is currently underway for the 1998 PA Housing Seminar. It's scheduled to be held at the Penn State Conference Center Hotel (formerly the Scanticon), State College, on Friday, February 20, 1998.

If you have any comments or suggestions for the 1998 Seminar, please feel free to call Eric Burnett of the PHRC at (814) 865-2341 or fax or e-mail.

Search for an Assistant Director for the PHRC

The following is the text of an advertisement now being distributed:

The Pennsylvania Housing Research Center (PHRC) is seeking a full-time Assistant Director. The PHRC is a research and development and technology transfer organization that has been in existence since 1988. You'll be the primary contact person for the home building industry (PBA, the utilities, the modular housing industry, manufactured housing industry, producers, manufacturers, etc.); assist in the development, funding and execution of projects; and service the technical concerns of the industry as well as the general public.

You must have relevant experience and a knowledge of the housing business especially in Pennsylvania; the ability to initiate, manage, and write technical reports; and be familiar with building science, energy conservation, and building construction. A degree in Civil Engineering, Architectural Engineering or Mechanical Engineering would be advantageous. Position requires some travel.

Interested candidates should send a resume and a cover letter to:

**Employment Division, Job #1543
120 S. Burrowes St.
University Park, PA 16801-3857
FAX# (814) 865-3750. TDD (814) 863-0304**

This position has been or is being advertised in the Harrisburg Patriot, on the Internet, by Penn State, in the PHRC newsletter, and by word of mouth. The position is an important one and it is important that the right person be chosen. This is not an academic position. It is intended to be a pro-active staff cum consultant/advisor/liaison career position. Please circulate this notice at your discretion.

PHRC Projects

The PHRC gets its base funding from the PBA, Penn State and numerous individuals, groups and companies within the industry. In 1996/97 the PHRC, for the first time, also received financial support directly from the State. Those PHRC projects that received some state funding in the 1996/97 fiscal year were:

INDUSTRIALIZED HOUSING:

Builder's Guide to Modular Housing: Evaluating the Costs of Modular and Stick-built Construction using ACE.

A Multi-media Education/Training and Marketing Software System*

The Importance of the Modular Housing Industry to Pennsylvania

BELOW-GRADE / BASEMENT TECHNOLOGY:

Issues and Needs

Modeling and Insulation Strategies

Alternative Foundation Wall Systems

Reducing the Risk and Minimizing the Consequences of Flood Damage to Houses

BUILDING MATERIALS AND SYSTEMS:

Modeling and Optimization of Alternative Floor Systems *

Building Science Considerations for Steel-Stud Framing*

Cladding/Window Technology *

ENERGY CONSERVATION:

Energy Conservation Economics in Single Family Homes (MEC Study)*

The projects denoted * will continue on into the 1997/98 year.

The PHRC was granted State support for the 1997/98 fiscal year. In addition to some of the above projects, we are currently planning to initiate work on the following projects:

BUILDING MATERIALS AND SYSTEMS:

A Full Scale, Field Test Facility for Enclosure Systems

Implications of Using Housewrap

Remediation and Repair of Masonry

BELOW-GRADE / BASEMENT TECHNOLOGY:

Indoor Environmental Control Cost Impacts on Habitable Basements

INDUSTRIALIZED HOUSING:

The Importance of the Manufactured Housing Industry to Pennsylvania

TRAINING/EDUCATION:

House Building Industry Educational Needs Assessment

Statewide BOCA/CABO and MEC Training

ENERGY CONSERVATION:

A Field Study of Air Leakage Paths in Houses

Development of Requirements for the Evaluation and Certification of Third Party Model Energy Code Compliance Software

The PHRC is also doing work in a number of other areas and is actively pursuing support for work that has relevance for the building industry both in and outside Pennsylvania. We welcome your feedback not only with regard to the above projects but also about

work that you think needs to be done. You can reach us either by mail, e-mail, or phone.

Dialogue:

In the last newsletter we mentioned that we were interested in making the newsletter a bit livelier. It was also mentioned that the Director had recently had a house built in State College and, in the process, underwent an expensive crash course on local construction practices.

A house issue that has already reared its ugly head is the delicate one of toilets e.g., how does one find a 1.6 gallon toilet that works properly, why do the new toilets have to be streamlined or so low or so expensive, does it really make sense to install a gigantic Jacuzzi bath in the same room as an water miser toilet, etc., etc.?

While trying to think of a way to write a short and lively article about this topic, a syndicated piece by the Miami columnist Dave Barry appeared on July 20. As his writing is a lot more interesting and livelier than ours, we obtained his permission to repeat this piece in full. We would like to thank Mr. Barry for granting us permission to reprint his copyrighted column in this newsletter.

THE TOILET POLICE

If you call yourself an American, you need to know about a crucial issue that is now confronting the U.S. Congress (motto: "Remaining Firmly In Office Since 1798"). This is an issue that affects every American, regardless of race or gender or religion or briefs or boxers; this is an issue that is fundamental to the whole entire Cherished American Way of Life.

This issue is toilets.

I'm talking about the toilets now being manufactured for home use. They stink. Literally. You have to flush them two or three times to get the job done. It has become very embarrassing to be a guest at a party in a newer home, because if you need to use the toilet, you then have to lurk in the bathroom for what seems (to you) like several presidential administrations, flushing, checking, waiting, flushing, checking, while the other guests are whispering: "What is (your name) DOING in there? The laundry?"

I know this because I live in a home with three new toilets, and I estimate that I spend 23 percent of my waking hours flushing them. This is going on all over America, and it's causing a serious loss in national productivity that could really hurt us as we try to compete in the global economy against nations such as Japan, where top commode scientists are developing super-efficient, totally automated household models so high-

tech that they make the Space Shuttle look like a door-stop.

The weird thing is, the old American toilets flushed just fine. So why did we change? What force would cause an entire nation to do something so stupid? Here's a hint: It's the same force that from time to time gets a bee in its gigantic federal bonnet and decides to spend millions of dollars on some scheme to convert us all to the metric system, or give us all Swine Flu shots, or outlaw tricycles, or whatever. You guessed it! Our government!

What happened was, in 1992, Congress passed the Energy Policy and Conservation Act, which declared that, to save water, all U.S. consumer toilets would henceforth use 1.6 gallons of water per flush. That is WAY less water than was used by the older 3.5-gallon models—the toilets that made this nation great; the toilets that our Founding Fathers fought and died for—which are now prohibited for new installations. The public was not consulted about the toilet change, of course; the public has to go to work, so it never gets consulted about anything going on in Washington.

But it's the public that has been stuck with these new toilets, which are saving water by requiring everybody to flush them enough times to drain Lake Erie on an hourly basis. The new toilets are so bad that there is now—I am not making this up—a black market in 3.5-gallon toilets. People are sneaking them into new homes, despite the fact that the Energy Policy and Conservation Act provides for—I am not making this up, either—a \$2,500 fine for procuring and installing an illegal toilet.

I checked this out with my local plumber, who told me that people are always asking him for 3.5-gallon toilets, but he refuses to provide them, because of the law. The irony is that I live in Miami; you can buy drugs here simply by opening your front door and yelling: "Hey! I need some crack!"

Here's another irony: The federal toilet law is administered by the U.S. Department of Energy. According to a Washington Post article sent in by many alert readers, the DOE recently had to close several men's rooms in the Forrestall Building because—I am STILL not making this up—over-pressurized air in the plumbing lines was CAUSING URINALS TO EXPLODE. That's correct: These people are operating the Urinals of Death, and they're threatening to fine us if we procure working toilets.

The public—and this is why I love this nation—is not taking this sitting down. There has been a grassroots campaign, led by commode activists, to change the toilet law, and a bill that would do that (H.R. 859—The Plumbing Standards Act) has been introduced in Congress by Rep. Joe Knollenberg of Michigan. I talked to Rep. Knollenberg's press secretary, Frank Maisano,

who told me that the public response has been very positive. But the bill has two strikes against it:

1. It makes sense.
2. People want it.

These are huge liabilities in Washington. The toilet bill will probably face lengthy hearings and organized opposition from paid lobbyists; for all we know it will get linked to Whitewater and wind up being investigated by up to four special prosecutors. So it may not be passed in your lifetime. But I urge you to do what you can. Write to your congresshumans, and tell them you support Rep. Knollenberg's bill. While you're at it, tell them you'd like to see a constitutional amendment stating that if any federal agency has so much spare time that it's regulating toilets, that agency will immediately be eliminated, and its buildings will be used for some activity that has some measurable public benefit, such as laser tag.

So come on, America! This is your chance to make a difference! Stand up to these morons! Join the movement!

Speaking of which, I have to go flush.

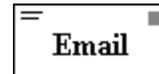
Director's Comment: In designing my new house we knew about the flush problem. We knew that there was also a "sit and never get up" problem which gets worse as one gets older. We therefore resisted buying any of the new low-slung, streamlined models. We also found out that none of the local suppliers stocked the one toilet that received top ranking from Consumer Reports. As a compromise we installed one 1.6 gallon, brand-name quality toilet and one "old" 3.5 gallon ADA toilet that the same manufacturer still happened to have in stock. Incredibly when we measured the tanks we found that the 1.6 gallon toilet has a tank that holds about 4 gallons, the 3.5 gallon flusher holds about 2 gallons. No the plumber didn't mix them up. I now have a flush problem with all the toilets. It's good to know that Dave Barry is on my side. I wonder if he would be interested in the Assistant Director position!

Send questions, comments, inquiries, problems to:

The Pennsylvania Housing Research Center
Attn: Michelle McMullen/Q&A
219 Sackett Building
University, PA 16802



FAX us at: (814) 863-7304



or E-MAIL us at: mlm3@psu.edu

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*The Pennsylvania Housing Research Center
The Pennsylvania State University
219 Sackett Building
University Park, PA 16802*

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