

## POTENTIAL PITFALLS OF SPECIFICATION... *an inspector's point of view*



*Mansfield Bus Station. Image courtesy of Kalzip Limited*

A simple decision on a typical working day such as substituting one component for another can have far reaching consequences and could cost a company millions of pounds in damages and legal costs should it be the wrong decision. The Metal Cladding and Roofing Manufacturers Association's (MCRMA) independent inspectors group can offer practical advice to keep you out of the courtroom.

Specifications can be a chore to prepare and frequently get cut and pasted from a similar job; however 'similar' will not be good enough should there be a legal dispute. Tenders are scrutinised forensically, as are drawings, minutes of meetings and conversations.

Once the situation gets into the legal system every word, nuance, sketch and comment is analysed in minute detail and is likely to be subjected to detailed cross examination by legal professionals trained to make a case for their clients. A simple, but critical, response to a question from a member of the design team, sales team or subcontractor will be examined in fine detail. A query to a member of the sales team or to a member of the technical department may get a different response which could prove critical and costly should legal proceedings ensue.

It will never be possible to get everything right; at best you can limit your exposure. The specification of the roofing and cladding works needs to be carefully considered and should involve a manufacturer or, for impartial advice, a roofing and cladding inspector who will also be able to assist in analysing tender specifications, commenting on the subcontractor's drawings and carrying out inspections of work on site.

Specifiers will often spend time selecting the key items of roofing and cladding systems, for example a built up roof or a composite panel system. However, the many products considered as the 'bits and pieces' can make a huge difference to the success or failure of a project. These include fasteners, sealants, spacers, insulation and flashings all of which have been known to contribute to failures and therefore costs, which can be significant. Every item of the roof or wall from the supporting steelwork to a seal can have a massive impact on the success of or failure of a project. It is vital that all of the components are compatible and able to perform adequately.

Commercial considerations, especially in today's climate, are key factors in the decision making process, sometimes at the expense of the project. How many specifiers are aware of the subtle differences in fasteners, sealants or spacers to be able to select them or do they leave that to others? It may be there is a request to change the whole roofing and cladding system for 'value engineering' reasons. Many of these decisions will not be thoroughly examined and rarely are the cost savings passed back to the client.



*The Pavilion Stand, Edgbaston Cricket Club. Image courtesy of Tata Steel*

Manufacturing members of the MCRMA spend huge amounts of time and money on research and quality control which shows in the designs and durability of the products that they supply. The majority of problems and failures that arise on site are not product failures but are caused to some extent by inappropriate design and primarily by site installation.

It is therefore essential that an experienced and reputable contractor is employed who understands that the selection of a material type or component does not exist in isolation and has potentially far reaching implications on other aspects of the performance of the completed building envelope.

Specifiers, be they architects, engineers or design and build contractors, need specialist advice and assistance to help them make the key decisions on grounds other than cost. They need a detailed, tailored specification, a carefully examined subcontractor's tender and considered comments on the subcontractor's working drawings.

Fees are under huge pressures, the number of site visits is limited and specifiers are frequently involved in other aspects of contract administration than to check whether an operative is using the right kind of tool to cut a sheet or tighten a fastener.

These are the areas on which a specialist roofing and cladding consultant can advise. They may know little about foundations, electricity, plumbing or the many other elements of a building; but they are specialists in a narrow field which will be of key importance to the success of the building envelope.

Specifiers may feel that they do not need the advice of an independent consultant before or during the construction process and it is hoped that they will not need them later in a legal process; however they are a vital part of the team who can help get it right in the first place.

The MCRMA independent roofing and cladding inspectors group has been established to provide a focus for clients who wish to be associated with thermally efficient, reliable and sustainable buildings. For detailed advice visit [www.mcrma.co.uk](http://www.mcrma.co.uk)

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*This article first appeared in RCi Magazine January 2014*

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