REGULATIONS, SYSTEMS, TRAINING AND GUARANTEES

RCi puts the questions to MCRMA director Carlton Jones

What areas of the market are showing real growth for your members?

MCRMA conducts twice yearly market surveys to ensure members have the latest information about market conditions and areas of change within the industrial, commercial and warehouse sectors. Over recent years the surveys have shown sustained growth in the value added sectors such as rainscreen cladding. However, the most recent survey has shown a dramatic year on year rise within the traditional cladding sectors; a change which shows confidence in the market and recovery in the cladding sector.

What are the big issues affecting your members at the moment?

The major concern is credit worthiness across the contracting chain and payment of invoices within the agreed and strict time frames. Without a sensible and structured approach the UK economy and the construction sector could quite quickly fall into a situation where projects could be delayed or put on hold because of a limit on cash flow. The industry must work together to ensure that the current upward trend is converted into sustained growth.

How has the cladding sector adapted to the imposition of CE Marking as a legal requirement?

Very well! The principal manufacturers of profiled cladding within the UK have effectively been CE marking since 2007 when EN 14782 for roofing and cladding products used within twin skin construction came into force, but certainly since July 2013 when it became a legal requirement.

Likewise, MCRMA members who manufacture composite panels, rooflights, fasteners, spacer systems, safety lines and insulation products all comply with the Construction Products Regulations (CPR) and the appropriate hEN or CUAP.

Are there still issues around enforcing compliance?

Yes, we believe so! Enforcement of CE marking within the UK is enforced or policed by regional Trading Standards. The difficulty with this is that Trading Standards have responsibility for compliance across a wide range of products, systems and services and therefore their primary focus is on the serious issues; unfortunately CE marking of roofing and cladding products does not fall into that category.

However, I do see a trend towards the industry self-policing CE marking and information about lack of compliance by some companies could well be highlighted to Trading Standards for future investigation.

Another issue is that sub-contractors are not aware that it is a legal requirement to use CE-marked products where applicable; many are just unaware of CE marking.

You have raised concerns with certain product / system guarantees, what are your main issues surrounding guarantees?

We are concerned that some clients and building owners can confuse guarantees with warranties and that not all industry guarantees or warranties are based on the same criteria or offer the same backup. MCRMA would point out that some manufacturers and suppliers of “third party” guarantees, which may involve payment of a premium, need careful consideration before commitment. We would also draw attention to the fact that some restrictions imposed within the wording of the documentation may fall outside of what is regarded as clear and fair or what is practical or achievable.

Over the last few years we have heard concerns regarding cladding contractors sourcing components and materials from various different manufacturers, assembling them and then passing them off as a complete cladding system. Is this still happening and what are the main problems with this?

Unfortunately it does still happen and the recent downturn has made it increasingly tempting to cut business costs and maximise margins. A collection of individual component parts which are brought together to form an assembly, but not a system, can have serious consequences for the main contractor, cladding contractor, building owner and those involved with subsequent operation and maintenance.

These assemblies are brought together without any consideration for design constraints, compatibility, long term performance and sustainability or Health and Safety - all things that manufacturers have spent much time and investment getting right. So-called assemblies which use a collection of components can have serious legal consequences for those who attempt to assemble the parts (I will not use the word design!), and those who ratify or condone their use. Subsequent failures will without doubt result in claims and may result in criminal proceedings if negligence is a factor.

What can be done to bring this practice to a halt?

Primarily specify and then ensure that a complete fully designed and manufactured system is actually sourced from a reputable manufacturer or supplier who understands the needs of the project and who can design a fully engineered system for the application. Alternatively, work with a lead manufacturer who has the technical capability and the technical relationships with other leading supply partners to enable them to design a solution which is fully designed and guaranteed to work in the application.

I suppose this practice links directly to another issue which has received a lot of coverage recently, that of the non-fragility of roofs. MCRMA works closely with Advisory Committee for Roofsafety (ACR) who wrote an interesting piece in RCI earlier this year where they stated "Everyone who goes on to a roof should remember that all roofs will become fragile with time, it is just a matter of when…" What is your advice to the market regarding roof non-fragility?

MCRMA was a founder member of the ACR and we fully support the initiative that roof safety is paramount. MCRMA recently issued a comprehensive guidance document on this subject which includes a detailed checklist that must be considered before accessing any roof; clearly, if there is any doubt about a roof's fragility then the advice is not to access the roof until further checks can be made by a competent person.

It must be noted that non-fragility is not product based but system based and this leads me back to your earlier question about assemblies rather than systems.

Manufacturers and suppliers of systems continue to test their systems for non-fragility and from that issue a statement about the non-fragility of the system with all of its specified component parts. Assemblies are rarely tested for non-fragility and therefore they have serious question mark hanging over them which could result in a tragic accident and legal proceedings.

In the July issue of RCI (p.22), SPRA CEO James Talman put forward some pretty strong views on the issue of training where he stated: "The first thing to do is surely to create a unified strategic approach to training backed by all roofing sectors and not dictated by self-interest."

He also stated that he feels a "national centre of excellence covering all facets of core curricula training" would serve the roofing sector better. What are your thoughts on the standard of training in the roofing sector, and what changes, if any, would you like to see now the roofing sector manages its own CITB training funds?

Training should be focused at all levels within the construction industry. It's important to meet the needs of the specifier with the provision of CPD modules and also the site workforce with system specific training modules.

In my view, the manufacturers are well versed in providing support to all levels of the industry. Historically, MCRMA has managed a series of three day introductory training courses for new starters and this is currently being revised with the help and assistance of CITB and Roofing Industry Alliance (RIA).

In addition the MCRMA is taking an active role representing the industry on the National Working Group (NWGs) for cladding. The NWG bodies were established by CITB for identified occupational areas and will establish and maintain National Occupational Standards (NOS) that meet the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) requirements. Training is always important because it brings out the best in people and it ensures quality and consistency but training is only possible with adequate funding and commitment by both trainers and those who are being trained.

The Government has announced the requirement for collaborative 3-D BIM on all its projects by 2016. What is the MCRMA's view on BIM and how should contractors and installers be preparing to work with Main Contractors etc. as BIM becomes a mandatory requirement?

It seems to me that the construction industry as a whole does not have a clearly defined policy about what information is available and what is required; the depth and range of information and how it will be used. A simple request to a manufacturer from the designer or main contractor for their BIM models may not provide the right information or in the correct format or level of detail.

It is evident that there is a need for robust BIM data templates which will ensure that the roofing and cladding sectors can meet the needs of the industry. The MCRMA has formed a BIM working group to develop a BIM strategy across the industrial and commercial roofing and cladding sector; a significant number of our members have considerable experience in BIM and we are working closely with national groups and other manufacturing technologies to provide BIM data for design, manufacturing and future maintenance.

Could you tell us a bit about the research the MCRMA is undertaking with Salford University on acoustics / sound reduction and what this will mean for the market?

Twenty years ago, MCRMA commissioned Salford University to produce an acoustic performance prediction model for profiled roofing and cladding systems. It was our aim then to lead the field in this sector and also provide members with a computer model which would enable them to advise specifiers and gain commercial advantage.

The current work programme involves a radical rethink and review of the existing prediction model with the aim to introduce new techniques and calculation methodology based on modern research engineering and practice.

The current phase will also include multi-layer configurations, effects of through connections and rooflight configurations. The prediction tool is a major development which will enable member companies to fine tune or engineer their acoustic systems and also provide specifiers with predicted results for specific systems and constructions.

This article first appeared in RCi magazine, September 2014

DISCLAIMER

Whilst the information contained in this publication is believed to be correct at the time of publication, the Metal Cladding and Roofing Manufacturers Association Limited and its member companies cannot be held responsible for any errors or inaccuracies and, in particular, the specification for any application must be checked with the individual manufacturer concerned for a given installation.

Information provided by the MCRMA or contained within publications and articles which are made available in any form (mechanical, electronic, photocopying or otherwise) cannot be used or cited as a means of ensuring that a material, product, system or assembly is compliant with Building Regulations.