

CORRECT SPECIFICATION CANNOT BE IGNORED!

In recent years, the construction sector has come under heightened scrutiny and improving the technical and commercial expertise across those who work in the industry linked with formal training, qualifications and quality assurance, at all levels, is now high on the agenda from government, control bodies, third party assessors and businesses involved from the initial design stage to operational use for all building types and sectors.

Metal cladding systems provide efficient, aesthetically pleasing and sustainable solutions for a wide variety of external building envelopes. However, the success of these systems can be compromised when specifications are changed under the disguise of 'value engineering' by sectors within the industry who, in looking to achieve the cheapest price or to maximise profit, source materials and associated components from companies who may not operate to the highest standards.

Inevitably, the fall-out from the COVID-19 pandemic will make it tempting to cut business costs and to achieve the lowest price by sourcing materials and associated components from different manufacturers and then assembling them as a 'cladding system' when it is nothing of the sort!

Unfortunately, this results in a system that has no approved design, no confirmation of performance and no third-party assessment. This raises critical issues for the structural integrity, thermal performance, fire performance and lifespan of the materials and has serious implications for the building owner; in the event of a problem there is no recourse to a sole manufacturer and there is no system warranty

Manufacturing members of the MCRMA spend a great deal 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 that arise on site are not product failures but are caused to some extent by inappropriate design and mismatch of non-compliant products.



Sotech Optima's secret fix rainscreen cladding system used on Brunel Place, Slough

It is therefore essential that an experienced and reputable system installer 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.

This need has been recognised by MCRMA and as part of its continuing drive to raise standards and ensure compliance across the industry, the MCRMA has recently expanded its scope of membership to include system installers who can deliver from specification through to the design and construction of a range of metal-clad buildings.

Every item of the roof or wall from the supporting steelwork to the smallest component 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 as a recognised system. Commercial considerations are key factors in the decision-making process, sometimes at the expense of the project. For example, 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?

One of the issues associated with the specification/cost link is the term 'equal or approved'. For those downstream of the initial design process it usually provides a loophole to initiate change and perhaps remove an element of cost, remove a degree of quality or improve margins.

Problems are likely to arise when components and materials are sourced from various different manufacturers, assembled and then passed off as a complete cladding system whereas in reality, it may be a conglomerate of incompatible products, brought together to form an assembly, but not a system.



Ash & Lacy's perforated metal façade system -the Gateway Scheme, Lime Street, Liverpool

These assemblies are put together without any consideration for design constraints, compatibility, long term performance and sustainability or health and safety issues. This has implications for those who attempt to assemble the parts and those who ratify or condone their use as subsequent failures will result in claims and may result in criminal proceedings if negligence is a factor.

All these problems can easily be avoided by specifying a fully designed, manufactured and installed system from MCRMA members who understand the needs of the project and who can design a fully engineered system for a specific application. Choosing an MCRMA member comes with the reassurance of knowing that all member companies are carefully vetted to ensure that they have a good trading record, adequate levels of the relevant liability insurances, comply with health and safety legislation, and meet their responsibilities with regard to environmental issues.

Detailed information on all MCRMA member companies can be found on the MCRMA web site at www.mcrma.co.uk

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