

As Printed in HVAC Insider LA/MS, June 2011

SE LA. Industry Presents "Foam House Forum" To Address Mounting Problems with Spray Foam Insulation

Over a hundred HVAC contractors gathered on April 26 at the Plumber's Union in Metairie, LA, to hear a panel of local and regional experts address questions related to Spray Foam Insulation. Air-conditioning and homebuilding industry leaders offered this training, given the need for attention to the problems now being posed as a result



of the unregulated growth of the foam insulation industry. The health hazards include exposure to carbon monoxide and mold, not to mention building durability problems, when foam is installed improperly and without coordination with HVAC contractors in a "whole house" approach.

The purpose of the Foam House Forum (which will be repeated for a General Public audience on May 24) is to provide orientation on the building science issues involving houses that are either fully or partially insulated with Spray Foam, as a way of assisting contractors and others to avoid liability in these situations, by helping to prevent hazards from occurring. Although other types of insulation also can be problematic, the fast and continuing growth of the spray foam industry in recent years is threatening on a broader scale. This is particularly important where gas appliances are involved and where living areas lack proper ventilation. In the hot, humid climate of South Louisiana and Mississippi, careful attention to these issues is required, and additional expenses for testing the air leakage of ductwork as well as the thermal envelope of the building - which will indicate the extent of need for mechanical ventilation -- should be expected.

A common situation involves homeowners (now encouraged by Federal, State, and Local government energy efficiency incentives) who have spray foam added to the roofline of their attics, converting a previously ventilated attic to a sealed one, without realizing that the gas furnace already there relies on a constant source of fresh air for the ventilation of natural gas and the toxic byproducts of incomplete combustion. To preserve health & lives, public education efforts must include the further education of architects, home designers, contractors, engineers, and inspectors -- in renovation and new construction projects. When the plans for insulation & air-conditioning work (usually performed by sub-contractors) either change during the project or are not well-coordinated initially, health threats to the occupants and building performance problems (from improper A/C sizing) are more likely.

Experts on the panel were:

Paul Lagrange
FOAM INSTALLER, ENERGY AUDITOR, AND BPI-certified

Tim Pierre
CODE ENFORCEMENT, Jefferson Parish

Audrey Evans
RESNET -certified HOME ENERGY & GREEN RATER

Clayton Farmer
GREEN BUILDING VERIFIER, EXAMINER & INSPECTOR, BPI-certified

David Vaughn
BURTIN POLYMER AND AIA-certified

Allen Huth
FOAM DEPOT

John Mata
IAPMO

Claudette Reichel
PROFESSOR, EXTENSION HOUSING SPECIALIST, LSU AgCenter

Kenny Robert
LOUISIANA HEAT PUMP ASSOCIATION

Barry Couvillion
COMFORT INSTITUTE

Randy Noel
HBA; LOUISIANA UNIFORM CONSTRUCTION CODE COUNCIL

Mark Roberts
INTERNATIONAL CODE COUNCIL

Mak Kersenak
ASHRAE AND COAST ENERGY SOLUTIONS

Randy Petit
HVAC EXCELLENCE

The sponsor of the trainings is the Southeast Louisiana Coalition of the Air Conditioning Industry (SELA CACI), which was formed in 2007 as a voluntary effort to advance education in the industry after Katrina. Membership is free, and trainings are low-cost and held on a roughly monthly basis, except during the summer. The Coalition has provided trainings for its own members on the proper installation of gas furnaces in foam-sealed attics, and seeks to help prevent problems that homeowners may face otherwise. For more information, contact selacaci@gmail.com.

Submitted by Audrey Evans, SELA CACI Secretary, 504-488-2412