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Pick and mix approach could prove fatal for building owners

A BUILDING, AT ALL STAGES OF ITS LIFE-CYCLE, PRESENTS A NUMBER OF RISKS, FROM THE INITIAL DESIGN THROUGH TO COMPLETION AND ULTIMATE DISPOSAL, AS DAVID HICKS, A MEMBER OF THE METAL CLADDING AND ROOFING MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION, EXPLAINS

It is the responsibility of the client, architect and main contractor to assess these risks and advise the entire team of any areas for concern.

Adhering to a specification helps mitigate the risk by providing a robust framework to which all parties involved can work.

However, recently there has been a worrying return towards a 'pick and mix' approach to projects, phased out in the 80s, which has seen some main contractors encouraging roofing and cladding suppliers to break specification, in order to reduce costs. While the cladding contractor may be tempted by the cheaper option, the ultimate responsibility for cutting corners when the building fails, will remain with the investor, developer and tenant. Working with a main contractor who understands the risks and the value of a specification should not be underestimated.

Safety (Non-Fragility) - ACR[CP]001:2007 Rev3 'Recommended Practice for Work on Profiled Sheeted Roofs' contains within its guidance an aide memoire for designers, specifiers and inspectors. This is a document that should be added to every specification, requesting that the successful roofing contractor completes the Annex C questionnaire to prove compliance for the system in its entirety. In the event of an accident, which could result in a fatality, each link in the supply chain will be examined to ensure that every effort was made to follow best practice. Failure to prove due care and attention leaves the entire team at risk of prosecution.

Thermal Compliance (U-value and Psi value) - In order to meet government regulations and pass building control, the thermal performance of the building envelope is critical, in proving compliance. Elemental U-values, for roof and wall cladding systems for example, must be calculated based on project specific information. Without calculating the construction in its entirety, compliance cannot be proven.

Independent Certification (BBA and LPCB) - Independent verification from companies such as the British Board of Agrément (BBA) provides impartial confirmation that important features of a product or system will perform as per the manufacturer's claims. It is important to note that verification of individual components, such as the external sheet material, will at best be achieved when fitted in a certain application, the results will be affected depending on how the cladding contractor chooses to assemble the component.

Guarantees - (System, Coating, Flashing and Fixing) - The validity of many guarantees and warranties, currently in circulation, are a major cause for concern throughout the construction sector. The inclusion of unreasonable terms and conditions, such as extreme temperature parameters or mandatory annual inspection requirements, are commonplace and contracts are often unknowingly breached rendering them null and void. The industry should be pushing for meaningful guarantees at every stage of the project, not searching for the cheapest solution, which will end up costing the owner or tenant in the long-term.

The use of multiple components from different manufacturers makes proving responsibility, should a problem occur, extremely difficult. Using a system with all components supplied from a single manufacturer eliminates this problem. While the recession has re-introduced a need to take greater risk in the hope of survival, companies must understand that by taking a 'pick and mix approach' they are buying in to sub-standard practices hidden by worthless guarantees and warranties and, in the worst case scenario, they are putting lives in danger through poor roof installation. It is incumbent on the specifier to halt this dangerous spiral downwards and bring sanity and value back to the specification process. Cost reduction 'value engineering' is no excuse for taking unnecessary risks.

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