CONTRACTOR'S ALERT – 2013.7

In today's construction environment, more items are being brokered out to third parties. The latest is the construction material testing procedure. Your project may have a company that represents themselves as a testing agency, but the actual material testing may be by a third party for cost reasons, or because the lab represented on your project is too busy.

When test results are low or marginal, you, the contractor, are assumed guilty until proven innocent. There are a few simple steps to follow to make sure that everybody follows consistent procedures.

1. **If the wall must be cored, core 7 to 14 days after grouting.**

Historically, we have found that coring walls 7 to 14 days after grouting yields slightly better shear bond between the grout and the unit. This is likely a result of the grout strength being closer to the unit strength in the 7 to 14 day period. Be proactive in the core scheduling.

2. **Find out who is doing the actual testing.**

This is more than finding out who the name of the field representative. Find out when samples are going to be picked up from the jobsite and where are they going. Are they going directly to the laboratory where the testing will be performed? Ask how they will be stored. Prism specimens, for example, are to be stored in moisture-tight bags at a temperature of 75ºF ± 15ºF.

3. **Determine if the tests are required by the code and project documents.**

Building Codes and Standards are constantly changing. For example, historically, mortar and grout tests were always required, but the more current versions of the California Building Code may not require mortar and grout tests when prisms are used to verify the compressive strength of masonry.

4. **Become familiar with the Published Standards.**

As a contractor, you should become very familiar with testing requirements. For example, ASTM C270 and C780 both clearly state that field-tested mortar does not correlate to the strength values of ASTM C270, Table 2, yet most contractors think that mortar test results below the values contained in Table 2 are inadequate.

5. **Request that you be present during the testing procedure.**

If the Laboratory is reluctant to let anyone watch the testing procedure, then there is concern about the Testing Laboratory following the required procedure methods set forth in the ASTM Standards.

6. **Take photographs.**

This is probably the most important action. Documentation of the testing procedure from the casting of specimens all the way through destructive testing will provide valuable information should the reported test results be interpreted as not meeting the code or project requirements.

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