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South Carolina Recognizes Benefits of Wood in School Construction

Public School Facilities Committee Changes Manual to Allow Wood Use

South Carolina (November 3, 2009) ... Continuing a trend that started last year in Arkansas, the South Carolina Public School Facilities Committee has voted to change the SC School Facilities Manual to allow greater use of wood in school construction—a move that will save the district money while opening the door to schools that are better for the environment and better for learning. It will also allow the district to take advantage of a broader range of building designs that meet the same high standards for safety and service life.

“We congratulate the administration for recognizing that the manual needed to change,” said Pat Schleisman, PE, regional director of Woodworks Southeast. “The previous policy was based on some long-standing misperceptions, but as Arkansas recognized last year when its prohibitive legislation was changed, wood offers a lot of benefits—especially to school districts trying to cope with decreasing budgets and increasing numbers of students. The reality is that wood schools can easily meet the same exacting standards for safety and service life as other materials, but provide much needed advantages related to cost, speed of construction, design flexibility, energy efficiency and sustainability.”

“Although heavy timber construction was already permitted, the Committee adopted the IBC language allowing wood for Type III and Type V Construction* with no significant amendments,” said Bryan Readling, PE, Senior Engineered Wood Specialist for APA – The Engineered Wood Association. “This change is great for school districts, which can now get more school for less money, and it’s also great for the South Carolina economy which is heavily dependent on forestry and wood manufacturing.” According to the South Carolina Forestry Association, 67% of the state is forested and the wood sector is the largest manufacturing employer.

In terms of cost savings, the following examples have been reported to APA for Arkansas schools originally designed in steel or concrete and converted to wood framing following the legislative change:

- Eldorado High School – 318,000 square feet
 - Wood framing saved \$20 per square foot for a total savings of \$6,360,000
- Newport Elementary School – 125,000 square feet
 - Wood framing saved \$21 per square foot for a total of \$2,625,000
- Fountain Lake Middle School – 48,000 square feet
 - Wood framing saved \$40 per square foot for a total savings of \$1,920,000
(Note: bidding took place before steel prices dropped)

In addition to cost, a study released in 2007 by McGraw-Hill Construction found that the education sector was the fastest growing market for green building—an area where wood excels.

In addition to being the only major building material that's renewable and sustainable, wood is the only material with third-party certification programs in place to verify that products being sold originate from a sustainably managed resource. North America has more certified forests than any other part of the world and, according to *State of the World's Forests* reports published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, has as much forested land now as it did 100 years ago.

Independent life cycle assessment (LCA) studies show that wood is better for the environment than other materials in terms of embodied energy, air and water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and offers more efficient resource use. It's also an important tool in the fight against climate change—because it continues to store the carbon absorbed during a tree's growing cycle and because substituting wood for fossil fuel-intensive materials such as steel or concrete results in 'avoided' greenhouse gas emissions.

It was these and other benefits that helped convince the South Carolina Public School Facilities Committee to change the manual. "Wood schools offer excellent performance in earthquakes and high winds, so they're common in California," said Schleisman, who worked with APA and the South Carolina Forestry Association to demonstrate the advantages of wood schools. "We started this process by taking a delegation from the Southeast on a tour of California wood schools—to let people see for themselves the kind of warm and inviting learning environments that can be created while providing all of these other benefits."

The tour was attended by architect Chris Voso, an advisor to the subcommittee evaluating the issue for the Office of School Facilities, who said it gave him an opportunity to see firsthand that wood is a viable option for schools. "When properly detailed and constructed, wood framed buildings give the school district a facility that meets all International Building Code requirements concerning life safety at the same time freeing up budget dollars to be used on needed educational spaces," he said. "The decision to remove the restrictions on wood construction in schools gives the owner and architect another option for designing schools that meet today's sustainable construction goals in a cost-effective way."

For more information, visit [woodworks.org](http://www.woodworks.org) to download the publication, "Designing Wood Schools" (http://www.woodworks.org/files/PDF/publications/Wood_Schools.pdf).

About WoodWorks

An initiative of the Wood Products Council, WoodWorks is a cooperative venture of all the major wood associations in North America, as well as research organizations and government agencies. It provides one-stop access to the widest possible range of information on the use of wood in non-residential structures. For more information, call 1-866-966-3448 or visit www.woodworks.org.

**Type III construction allows wood roof and floor systems as well as interior wood-frame walls. Fire-resistant-treated (FRT) wood is required to frame exterior wood-frame walls. Type V is the most common type of wood construction and is allowed for school design. Type V is typically the least expensive type of construction, particularly when load-bearing walls are wood. The IBC allows use of untreated wood throughout a Type V structure.*

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