Standards tarnishing the image of a fine University

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Flagrant examples of standards that protect the building industry and promote substandard building practices

The final TRCC commission approved performance standards that limit liability for the home building Industry and gives a false sense of security to new homebuyers. The final approved Building Performance Standards, by design, protect the industry and promote shoddy construction. Many are now questioning Texas A&M's participation in any program that reduces building standards. This type of activity is not only tarnishing A&M's reputation but makes it difficult for competent builders to compete with shoddy builders.

The following are several glaring examples:

1. Unlimited 1/8 inch Masonry Mortar cracks acceptable
Performance standards for masonry including brick, block, and stone: "A masonry mortar crack shall not equal or exceed 1/8 of an inch in width."

TRCC and Texas A&M reason that "mortar undergoes a curing process that results in shrinkage of the mortar" as the reason that a builder should be allowed to build a home that has 1/8" cracks in the mortar joints. A mortar joint is typically no more than 1/2" wide. By allowing an 1/8" crack in the mortar joint and justifying the crack as "normal curing and shrinking," this standard clearly encourages substandard building practices. Theoretically using this standard, TRCC and Texas A&M are trying to convince the home buying public that when a 2000 square foot slab foundation is poured, as it "cures and shrinks" the slab will eventually shrink to a 1500 square foot slab. Again, TRCC and Texas A&M would like new homebuyers to believe that unlimited cracks are acceptable in a new home.

2. Unlimited Cracks in patios, driveways, and walkways acceptable
Performance standards for exterior concrete including patios, driveways, walkways, stairs: "A crack in exterior concrete shall not cause vertical displacement equal to or in excess of 1/4 of an inch or horizontal separation equal to or in excess of 1/4 of an inch.

The TRCC explains that because patios and driveways are exposed to sunshine and rain, they are under terrific hardship and the builder should not have to build a driveway any better than this. With this reasoning, our nations bridge overpasses and skyscrapers would be crumbling to the ground. Second, the TRCC, in cooperation with TEXAS A&M Construction Science Dept. does not place any limit on the number of these 1/4" wide and 1/4" tall cracks. As written, the builder can build a driveway that develops 10,000 of these cracks and he is not required to repair the patio, driveway, etc.

3. No limit on length and number of cracks in drywall
Performance standards for drywall: "A drywall surface shall not crack such that any crack equals or exceeds 1/32 of an inch at any point along the crack."

Again, the TRCC and Texas A&M place no limit on the length of the cracks or the number of the cracks allowed in just one wall of your new home. These supposed performance standards will allow a builder to build your new home with tens of thousands of drywall cracks of any length crack.

4. No limit on length and number of cracks in stucco, brick, etc
Performance standards for exterior siding: "Siding shall not have cracks or splits that equal or exceed 1/8 of an inch in width."

Again, TRCC and Texas A&M place no limit on the length of the cracks and no limit to the number of cracks in your exterior siding. This includes wood siding, stucco, brick exteriors, etc.

5. Unlimited 1/8 inch Stucco cracks
Performance standards for stucco: "Stucco shall not have cracks that equal or exceed 1/8 of an inch in width at any point along the crack."

TRCC and Texas A&M would have you believe that a single stucco wall should be allowed to have 500-10,000 30 foot long cracks due to "curing and shrinkage".

6. 1/4 inch gap in screens welcomes mosquitoes and insects
Performance standards for both doors and windows: "A screen in a door or window shall fit properly,,,A screen shall not have a gap equal to or exceeding 1/4 of an inch between the screen frame and the window frame."

Apparently, in Texas, the mosquitoes and gnats are so BIG that they can't fit through a 1/4" gap. Maybe, Texas A&M thought only AGGIE MOSQUITOS would try to fit through the 1/4" gap that A&M and TRCC are going to allow the builders.

7. Fireplace cracks could pose fire hazard
Performance standards for fireplaces: "A crack in masonry hearth or facing shall not be equal to or exceed 1/4 of an inch in width."

It will be interesting to see what insurance companies will have to say about this standard. (and fire departments)

8. Buyer not protected for poor designed or restricted plumbing system
Performance standards for plumbing delivery systems: "Minimum static pressure at the building entrance for either public or private water service shall be 40 pounds per square inch in any part of the water supply system."

Again, TRCC and Texas A&M fail to protect the home buying public. This standard only speaks to static pressure. These standards do not address the performance of the plumbing system. When a fixture is operated or two fixtures are operated simultaneously, the pressure and flow can drop from 40PSI static, to ZERO (0) PSI. The standards do nothing to protect the home owner from a poorly designed or restricted plumbing system.

9. TRCC says sinking foundations are OK
Performance standards for slab foundations: "The slab shall not deflect after construction in a tilting mode in excess of one percent from the original construction elevations resulting in actual observable physical damage to the components of the home."

What TRCC and Texas A&M are going to allow the builder to construct is a home that tilted so much that it can be felt when walking across the home. This standard has the net effect of allowing a builder to build a home that is 80 feet wide or 80 feet long that that tilts/slopes over TEN INCHES (10") from one end of the home to the other. That is only if observable damage occurs to the home. If no observable damage occurs to the home, the TRCC and Texas A&M performance standards will allow the home to tilt/slope any amount and be recognized as acceptable building practices. As written, the warranty and performance standards drafted by Texas A&M and the TRCC will literally allow a builder to build a home that 'sinks' from one end to the other with no limit to the amount of sinking as long as there is no "actual observable damage". Is this not a preposterous standard to be suggested by a respectable University?

These performance standards as written and endorsed by Texas A&M University, the Texas Association of Builders, TRCC, and certain representatives of "third party warranty companies" interested in limiting their exposure. The standards are a collaboration of co-conspirators that have begun the process of tarnishing the image of a fine University and are detrimental to the quality of new home construction in Texas.