ICC EVALUATION SERVICE

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TO: Architects, engineers, specifiers, and other parties who may use ICC-ES Evaluation Reports

FROM: Michael O'Reardon, ICC-ES Regional Manager

There have been questions raised concerning the use of alternative products evaluated by ICC Evaluation Service, LLC (ICC-ES), when there is a standardized product prescribed in the model code. The questions include:

- Is it better to use a standardized product, when available, rather than an alternative product evaluated by ICC-ES?
- Is an alternative product evaluated by ICC-ES somehow "inferior" to a standardized product recognized in the code?

To answer these questions we first need to define the terms "alternative" and "standardized." "Standardized" products (also referred to as "commodities" and "prescriptive" products) are products for which standards are referenced in the model codes. Examples would be wood structural panels complying with the requirements of U.S. Department of Commerce DOC PS 1 or PS 2 [Section 2303.1.4 of the 2009 *International Building Code*® (IBC)], and preservative-treated wood complying with the American Wood Protection Association (AWPA) Standard U1 (Section 2303.1.8 of the 2009 IBC). "Alternative" products, on the other hand, are innovative, proprietary products that have been evaluated in accordance with Section 104.11 (*Alternative materials, design and methods of construction and equipment*) of the IBC and the 2009 *International Residential Code*® (IRC). Such products must be evaluated for compliance with the model codes and must then be approved by the code official. The code official is charged with approving products, whether standardized or alternative. When considering an innovative, proprietary product as an alternative to a standardized product, the code official has the option of using a research report from an approved source (IBC Section 104.11.1) as an aid in the approval process. Architects, engineers, and specifiers, and everyone else interested in using innovative building products, also need to know that such products meet code requirements and will perform as expected.

ICC-ES is the primary source of research reports on innovative building products. For more than eighty years (if you consider both the current ICC-ES and its predecessor, legacy organizations), ICC-ES has specialized in evaluating innovative, proprietary building products for compliance with the model codes. ICC-ES publishes Evaluation Reports that are posted to the worldwide Web for use by code officials, construction professionals, and the general public. ICC-ES Evaluation Reports are the best, most technically accurate, and most reliable source of information on innovative products because:

- ***ICC-ES policies are set by a Board of Directors composed mostly of code officials*** who are themselves engaged in enforcing building regulations.
- ***ICC-ES has an in-house technical staff of about 30 professionals, most of whom are licensed as architects or structural, civil, fire-protection or mechanical engineers.*** Key staff members have over 20 years of experience in evaluating products for code compliance.

Staff members also specialize in certain types of products, such as engineered wood, light gauge steel, concrete anchors, and products for protection of wood against decay and termites. No other organization possesses as much technical expertise, about the codes and about building products, as ICC-ES.

- ***ICC-ES has an open public process for developing acceptance criteria for innovative products under the International Codes.*** ICC-ES acceptance criteria establish minimum performance requirements, testing regimens, and other parameters needed for evaluating alterative products. Because all interested parties are invited to participate in criteria development, technical experts from around the globe contribute their knowledge as ICC-ES acceptance criteria are drafted, discussed, and put in final, approved form.
- ***ICC-ES technical work is overseen by an Evaluation Committee composed of code officials.*** As with the ICC code development process, where code officials determine which standards are to be utilized in the International Codes, the ICC-ES Evaluation Committee—composed of code officials from across the United States—is charged with seeing that ICC-ES acceptance criteria and published reports satisfy the needs of those enforcing building regulations.
- ***ICC-ES rules require that testing in support of evaluation reports be conducted by independent laboratories that are accredited under ISO 17025 (General Requirements for the Competence of Testing and Calibration Laboratories).***
- ***ICC-ES rules also require that third-party inspection agencies*** **(which play a vital part in the ICC-ES program)** ***be accredited under ISO 17020, General Criteria for the Operation of Various Types of Bodies Performing Inspection.***
- ***ICC-ES itself is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) as a product certification body under ISO Guide 65, General Requirements for Bodies Operating Product Certification System.*** This means that ANSI sends a team to the ICC-ES offices every year to review ICC-ES operations and make sure the organization continues to meet all requirements of the international standard for product certification agencies.

ICC-ES Evaluation Reports are an invaluable resource for code officials, and provide construction professionals with assurance that any new and innovative product, if the subject of an Evaluation Report, has been thoroughly evaluated by highly qualified personnel for compliance with the model codes. When considering the two questions noted above, it is clear that alternative building products, when they have been evaluated by ICC-ES, are in every way the equal of standardized products. **Code officials and others may rest assured that, in terms of quality, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability, and safety, products covered in ICC-ES Evaluation Reports meet every requirement of the International Codes.**

If you have any questions, please contact Michael O'Reardon at (800) 423-6587, extension 5685, or by e-mail at mo'readon@icc-es.org.