

Current Standard for Sustainable Roofing Neglects Importance of Durability

OCTOBER 2010



*Curt Liscum
Senior Consultant
Benchmark, Inc*

An interview with Curt Liscum, Senior Consultant at Benchmark, Inc.

Please share your perspective on how trends and perceptions in roofing have changed over the past 20 to 30 years.

In today's roofing market, we look a lot harder at the environmental impact of the roofing system. We consider this environmental impact over the entire duration of the roofing system life. We're much more aware of where products are produced, how they are manufactured, and what we're going to do with the materials once they have served their useful life.

Twenty years ago, what were the main factors that influenced your recommendations?

Product durability and its proven track record were the primary factors. Twenty years ago, there were a lot of new products coming out. Some worked better than others.

Back then, codes and standards were not as prevalent as they are today. Now it's much different. Codes, standards and risk management criteria have taken a lead in roof design. Energy codes and reflectivity requirements are abundant. ASTM material standards now exist for almost every product. As a specifier, I spend a lot of my time researching codes, standards and insurance requirements for a project.

Today, what are the main factors that influence your recommendations?

The most important factors that influence my recommendations today are still a product's durability and its proven track record. We want to recommend systems to our clients that we know will last and that will be durable enough to withstand the daily rigors of a given rooftop environment. We also have to follow the codes, standards and requirements established by our clients' insurance companies.

As I mentioned earlier, the environmental impact of roofing products is a big consideration these days. Many of our clients now are very interested in issues related to sustainability. For example, they want to know if a roofing product can be recycled or if it is energy efficient.

How do you define sustainability for the roofing market?

A sustainable roofing product is a product that doesn't harm the environment and one that will last its intended design life. The key ingredient in sustainability is long-term performance. A roof should last 20 to 30 years so the owner doesn't have to tear it off before its intended useful life is over. The way I see it, a sustainable roof is one that does not fail prematurely.



**INTELLIGENT
ROOFING SOLUTIONS**

Is your definition unique from the way the industry defines sustainability?

Yes. The accepted standard for sustainability in the industry is the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification program. I have a problem with using this standard for sustainability because it fails to take into account the durability or performance factor. The way the LEED program is designed, owners can get the same points for a LEED certified roof that lasts three years as they can for one that lasts 20 years. You can put a roofing system on a facility that is made with all the green products in the world, but if you have to take it to the dump after a few years, is it really sustainable?

From your perspective, what motivates a client to choose a sustainable roof?

Mainly, it is just good corporate citizenship. A huge segment of the population enjoys the public relations benefits that come with LEED certification. The majority of LEED certified buildings, however, are being built with tax dollars. States and municipalities partake in the LEED program to reap the public relations benefits or because some are mandated to do so. For example, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) requires that new construction projects and substantial renovations achieve a certain level of certification through LEED.

What does the future of the low-slope roofing market look like to you?

More people are going to embrace this concept of sustainability. It will probably become standard practice for people to ask for a sustainable roofing system. We all want the benefits of being good corporate citizens.

In the process, however, the industry is going to have to come to grips with the environmental significance of a product's durability. We need to educate owners so that they know they are not limited to either a sustainable roof or one that lasts. There are membrane systems out there that meet the highest requirements for energy efficiency, are made using manufacturing processes that are harmless to the environment, and they have proven long-term performance histories. Some of these products have recycled content and some have track records of lasting 30 years. The current accepted standard for sustainability must incorporate this issue.

The standard also will have to include measures of sustainability for the existing building market, instead of limiting its focus to new buildings.

Curt Liscum has been in the roof consulting business since 1979. Benchmark, Inc. is a professional roof and pavement consulting firm founded in 1983 that serves the entire United States and beyond from its home offices in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and Elm Grove, Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.benchmark-inc.com

For more information about FiberTite Roof Systems, please call Seaman Corporation at 800-927-8578, [or click here.](#)



INTELLIGENT
ROOFING SOLUTIONS

1000 Venture Blvd. • Wooster, Ohio 44691 • (800) 927-8578

www.fibertite.com