



On January 5 the American Lumber Standards Committee Board of Review met to further consider the issues presented by the proposed design value changes for Southern pine. NLBMDA, an active participant in the Southern Pine Design Value Forum, urged the Board to adopt those recommendations. Relying on the expert conclusions that no immediate public safety issue demands immediate design value changes, NLBMDA said that there have been legitimate concerns about the sampling and testing relied upon by the Southern Pine Inspection Bureau support the Forum recommendation that the Board return the proposal to SPIB for a more thorough sampling and testing of all grades and dimensions before proposing new design values for Southern pine. SPIB is in fact undertaking further testing of other grades and dimensions. At the heart of the Forum's recommendation is that design values for Southern pine be done once and only once, not once now (as a result of the tests done on No. 2 2x4s) and another time after further testing has been completed (on the other grades and dimensions).

NLBMDA also argued that the Board has the authority under the American Softwood Lumber Standard to adopt the recommended process and procedures for the consideration of design value changes. Further, the Board has the responsibility to balance competing technical, marketplace, and public policy issues. The Forum recommendation would also establish a predictable and deliberative means for stakeholders to participate in the review of sampling plans, test data, calculation of design values, and any decisions made by the Board. It would also importantly engender public confidence in the process. Finally, the proposed phase-in (whereby the Board gives notice 90 days before a planned vote to accept the final grade rule supplement text), is consistent with accepted rule making procedures. This stage of the recommended process was intended to address concerns that Board approval of design values prior to publication of the grade rule supplement and prior to inclusion in the model building codes would create confusion in the marketplace, uneven and unpredictable uptake of the new values and potential liability risks by users.

At the hearing it was learned that SPIB now expects to have its full in-grade testing of Southern pine completed in late Summer 2012 and to have design values submitted to the Board in October. Meanwhile, as of the day of the hearing, SPIB maintains that the Board should approve the design values as proposed last October. SPIB recently re-designated the design values in that proposal as "interim" design values. When queried, the USDA Forests Products Lab, which has vouched for the sampling and protocols used by SPIB, acknowledged that if the Board approves the pending design value proposal (now designated as interim), that there would likely be subsequent changes that would have to be approved in late 2012.

It's difficult to know when to expect a Board decision, or what that decision might be. While many thought the prospects strong that the Board would approve the initial recommendations when it last met in October, that feeling is probably less prevalent after today's meeting. Based on the questions from the Board and the acknowledgement at today's meeting that ongoing testing will yield different design values in October of this year, the prospects are greater for a more rational and less disruptive result.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Frank at frank@dealer.org.