



Building Practices: Resisting Forces of Nature

With what appears to be increasing frequency, natural disasters including hurricanes, earthquakes, mudslides, and wildfires have a devastating impact on homes and communities. Look more closely, however, and you'll find that newer homes better withstood the forces of these disasters.

Building Success 101

Q: FAQ: What is a "continuous load path"?

A: A continuous load path is an engineering term and building method that creates a structural frame that better resists various forces (or loads) placed upon it. Using a variety of metal connectors at key areas between framing components, such as bolting the walls to the foundation and strapping one floor to another, the entire house can function as one unit to resist a force placed upon it at any point. For instance, a continuous load path enables the walls and foundation to combat the pressure caused by high winds trying to lift the roof structure.

Why? A cooperative effort among homebuilders, building code agencies, and building product manufacturers has resulted in new houses that are better prepared to resist the forces of high winds, earthquakes, and other natural occurrences. While no house can withstand extreme conditions, today's new homes are built to endure, deflect, or retard the lateral forces of an earthquake, the airborne debris and pressure differences caused by high winds and hurricanes, and the spread of flames in a fire.

Professional homebuilders in so-called "high-risk" areas, such as coastal towns or areas with potential seismic activity, are committed to building homes that stand up to those risks. Combining new and better products, such as fire-resistant siding and roofing or impact-resistant windows, builders continue to improve the performance of their homes against natural forces. In addition, builders and architects utilize a number of design techniques that help deflect wind and stabilize a home's structure.

Building codes can also drive improved housing performance. Following Hurricane Andrew in 1992, for example, building codes in Florida and other affected areas required additional measures to ensure more reliable performance in high winds. Homes built throughout the Southeast weathered recent hurricane activity far better than homes built before the new codes were enacted.

Similarly, building codes in seismic areas require a higher level of steel reinforcement, stable soils, and engineered structural designs. Codes that regulate areas with a high risk of wild fires demand non-combustible roofing and firebreaks between vegetation or landscaping and the house itself.

Product manufacturers also play an important role. Primarily, they offer products that meet more stringent building codes, such as laminated glass for windows and doors, fire-resistant exterior finishes, and metal connectors that tie the home's structural frame together.

Suppliers also work closely with builders and with each other to devise more precise solutions for given circumstances. For instance, a lumber supplier might team up with a company that makes metal connectors to

design a stronger structural frame for homes built in seismic areas. Similarly, a window manufacturer may coordinate with a builder to determine whether impact-resistant glass or hurricane-rated shutters are the best option for homes built along the coast.

Manufacturers are also in tune with less dramatic but equally impactful forces, such as moisture and corrosion. Working with builders and code authorities, suppliers are producing products with corrosion-resistant coatings or finishes or non-metal alternatives. To keep water from the house, a water and moisture barrier and drainage systems can be used.

We are committed to continually improve the performance of our homes under any circumstances, extreme or not. Our mission and our passion is to create a comfortable and safe environment for your family, provide long-term assurances of your home's value, and protect your investment.

Warm regards,

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