

The Architects' and the Construction Managers' Role in the Quality Process

The construction manager has a duty to execute the work in accordance with the plans and specification, which requires quality planning, execution, assurance and monitoring and control. The architect, by tradition and sometimes by contract, is also involved with the construction quality process. The present status and direction of leadership and allocation of responsibilities between the architect and a construction manager is suggested by a recent construction claims court case: Black+Vernooy Architects vs. Smith 2010.

This case involved a residential wood deck that was constructed defectively with members and connection details not in accordance with the architect's plans. The deck collapsed and injured those in the area. The injured successfully sued the architect and contractor, and the architect was required to pay 10 percent of the award. The award decision was based in part on the architect's progress photographs that clearly showed the defective construction. (The architect did not notify the owner or take action that could have prevented the collapse.) The analysis of the case suggests that if these photographs did not exist, the architect may not have been found liable.

The architect, even when site supervision is included in the architect's AIA contract, is usually not required to "make exhaustive and continuous on site inspections of the quality or quantity of the work." And because of owner cost pressures, architects' contracts may include no or little on site inspection—some contracts require no on-site inspections, and many smaller and midsized projects require inspection only once to twice per month. Even for large projects (with hundreds or thousands of on site trade workers) that have some full-time on-site architectural personnel, these few personnel will be unable to monitor and document all work before concealment by following trades. On these same larger projects, the CM will have many layers of trade supervision and additional management personnel who would have capacity and potential to implement the quality process.

With this present reality, the CM must take the lead in this quality process. The architects' valuable input in this process must be sought through the CM's on site communication procedures such as weekly project meetings, focused technical issue review meetings and written communication such as RFIs (requests for information). These quality related services must be included in the original CM proposal to permit full and effective implementation.

Construction Specifier July 2011

©JF McCarthy 2011