

From: Charlie Barnes [mailto:apatokcb@tkf.att.ne.jp]
Sent: Thursday, February 18, 2000 9:14 AM

Subject: HQAL 10 Year Warranty & Durability Provisions - Meeting With Homebuilder Murata

During a meeting today with Mr. Murata (vice chairman of Zenkenren [JAHB], Yamaguchi Prefecture mover and shaker, host of venue for Wood Solutions seminar next month, etc.), we discussed the groundswell that is starting among builders to switch from green to KD and glulam. The capacity for KD is yet way insufficient and the regional wood products distribution trade thinks that things will probably continue as in the past. Murata-san said that builders are beginning to feel that they must move to KD or glulam due to the new 10 year warranty provisions and the liability of using green.

In Yamaguchi Prefecture, he said, the total kiln drying capacity is only 530 m³ / month, and one prefabricated home builder takes 320 m³ of that, with the rest going in 20 - 30 m³ lots. He also talked about MOC subsidy of prefectural programs to help local builders and MAFF Forestry Agency subsidies to look into increasing kiln capacity.

Up until now, probably only about 15 percent of all solid sawn posts and beams have been marked JAS, with the remaining 85 percent being marked with proprietary company names of famous wood producing regions of Japan and the company's grades. In the future, builders will likely want to have a product with the MAFF seal of approval that demonstrates that the product conformed to national standards. For potential dispute resolution in the future, Murata-san said that builders would have to take photos during the construction stage, so if a problem occurs, they can show the products they used. Pointing to a JAS mark would be a lot easier sell than some proprietary grade.

Murata-san said the revision of the JAS solid sawn standard taking place now will have a big impact, too. One category for finished lumber (most posts fall into this category, he said) establishes two levels - 15% and 20%. However, to get 20% at the site, one needs to dry to 16% at mill, so if it picks up moisture it will still be okay. He said Sumitomo Forestry has moved to using only material with 20 % MC or less, meaning that they require it to be 15% to 16% when it leaves the mill. This will be the current that sweeps the industry. Builders will have to respond what materials they are using and how they are comparable to the big p&b builders, the prefabers and others. They won't be able to ignore it. Also, the HQAL standard references the JAS standard and treating requirements, so that may add fuel, too. Let's all hope this translates into increased U.S. glulam exports to Japan !

Example of a domestic housing industry response at a prefecture-wide level to the Housing Quality Assurance Law.

Mr. Murata of Murata Corporation (Yamaguchi Prefecture) came by and discussed with Charlie and Paul Boardman the following about his Yamaguchi prefecture wood housing research/study group.

Background: The Housing Quality Assurance Law goes into effect in April, 2000. The Yamaguchi prefecture housing industry (Builders, architectural/design offices, timber retailers) are cooperating in the following manner in order to better compete under the new demands of the HQAL and in the new performance-based environment. The largest issue facing these mainly post and beam builders, is the dearth of supply of KD solid sawn lumber. They are anticipating a large scale move of the local industry from green to dry. Total drying capacity within the prefecture is 530 m³ of which 320 m³ is going to one company. The rest of is going to produce millwork.

The group called the Yamaguchi-ken Mokuzo Jutaku Kenkyu-Kai (Yamaguchi Prefecture Wood Housing Study Group) which Murata san chairs, is made up of approx 180 builders, 20

architectural offices, 44 lumber retailers/wholesalers. They are forming a kind of cooperative in order to pursue the following joint response to HQAL:

1. Type Approval pursued through the Kenchiku Gijutsu Shien Kyokai (roughly ‘Construction Technology Support Association’ - lead by ex Mitsui Homes, Mr. Abe). The Kenchiku Gijutsu Shien Kyokai has an impressive list of academics, engineers and influential industry people to help shepherd the Type Approval process through the authorities).
 - a. Type (group) Approval will be for a Yamaguchi prefecture brand house
 - b. Design and installation manual with set standards.
 - c. Installation manual in accordance with the various category Performance indications.

Other avenues they will pursue as a group:

Precutting, panelization (including 2x4 panels for post and beam), introduction of new technology and info to local builders, training for building inspectors, after-care maintenance training programs, guidebooks and sales-tools for consumers on the Type Approved home, etc.

Species used:

Although the Yamaguchi Prefecture Wood Housing Study Group’s program is securing central and prefectural funding and subsidies by ostensibly increasing the prefecture’s drying capacity for use of prefectural species, Murata san suggests that the present 70% share for DF for solid sawn will not be reduced significantly. There are processing and harvesting limitations within Yamaguchi prefecture (Sugi and Hinoki grow in Yamaguchi but are not harvested in abundance).

Subsidization:

As a group they are or will be subsidized on various fronts. They are seeking funding from the Forestry Agency to invest in more drying capacity within the prefecture. The prefectural government is also supporting the group. MOC subsidizes the group through the Housing and Wood Technology Center (HOWTEC).

On replication of Yamaguchi Wood Housing Study Group as a model;

Yamaguchi prefecture, according to Murata san, is the only prefecture to be this cohesive and advanced in its response. He said that they are being pointed to as a model case response by the regional smaller to medium sized housing industry to the HQAL. More prefectures will surely follow suit.

Impact of HQAL on JAS lumber in Post and Beam sector:

With the JAS revision, almost all solid sawn will have a moisture control content requirement of 20% or below. Although not much JAS stamped lumber is used in Post and Beam currently, that could drastically change with the introduction of the HQAL. Eager to reduce liability with the 10 year warranty, builders will specify JAS with its MC requirements and will go out of their way to make that explicitly part of their spec. The Yamaguchi Wood Housing Study Group will also spec a JAS or equivalent for their Type Approved and Yamaguchi branded home.