



Certification Confusion

Whose List Is It Anyway?

BY DEAN LEWIS

It appears there is some confusion in various quarters over how much difference there is among the various fenestration certification programs and whether there is a single comprehensive database for all manufacturers and products that are so certified. To elaborate, a little background explanation is necessary.

AAMA is both a standards development organization and a “certification body” (i.e., an organization operating a product certification system, as defined by ISO/IEC Guide 65, which defines the operating requirements for such bodies). These are distinct and separate functions, which can be the source of misunderstanding on the part of some observers.

About AAMA's Program

In the standards development capacity, AAMA has been developing door and window standards by industry consensus since 1947. Driven by the steady march of materials technology, increased performance concerns and evolving code requirements, the scope and stringency of these standards have increased continually, resulting in a wider array of products that perform far better than their predecessors.

The evolution process has been characterized by a change from prescriptive requirements to performance-based requirements, the inclusion of more performance factors and more framing materials, and the advent of the “material-neutral” philosophy. This has helped specifiers, contractors and building owners to decipher various manufacturers’ claims and pinpoint the greatest

value for the investment for specific building types and locations. The latest centerpiece in that effort is AAMA/WDMA/CSA 101/I.S.2/A440-08, *the North American Fenestration Standard/Specification for Windows, Doors and Skylights* (aka “NAFS-08”). Compliance with NAFS-08, or one of its predecessors, is required by the major model codes.

Such compliance, as well as guidance for architects, specifiers and building owners, is visibly and quickly demonstrated by third-party product certification.

The AAMA label, which manufacturers elect to affix to certified products, is now well-recognized throughout the industry as a definitive sign of compliance with code requirements. Supplemental certification is, of course, available for energy efficiency and specialized environments, such as those requiring sound control, impact resistance or enhanced security.

A Complex Unit

Note that today’s certification goes beyond basic quality assurance for completed fenestration units by recognizing that a window is a complex, interacting system of components—polymeric profiles, finishes, glass, weatherstrip, gaskets, sealants, hardware and screens—that must perform individually and in concert. Accordingly, the suite of component-related standards referenced within NAFS-08 and its predecessors are enforced through component verification, and compliant products are published on the AAMA Verified Component List (available online)—a pre-requisite for overall product certification.

Program users should note that, because the underlying NAFS-08 performance standard and its predecessors are available for industry-wide use, other certification programs have sprung up over the years based on those standards.

Each is an accredited stand-alone program, with slightly different organization, features and procedures, although all grant viable certification to the appropriate NAFS standard. Because the underlying component standards are part of the NAFS requirements, all must verify components in some manner analogous to AAMA’s Verified Components List. Because each certification program stands alone, each maintains its own Certified Products Directory and should be accessible and searchable online.

AAMA’s dual role as a standards developer and a certification body does not mean that AAMA maintains a comprehensive directory of all manufacturers and products that have been verified as complying with the standards’ requirements.

That is the responsibility of each certification program, as AAMA cannot attest to the accuracy of listings that are not its own.

Manufacturers should ensure that their buying influences are aware of the certification regime in which they are involved and direct “shoppers” to the appropriate directories. ■

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