

THE NAIL GUN MENACE



WHEN I
FIRST
BEGAN
IN THE

construction industry twenty years ago, I was trained to be a carpenter and had to ascertain a certain proficiency in all areas of wood working (framing, sheeting, rafter cutting, siding, right down to door hanging).

In today's building industry every trade is specialized. Production schedules and budget constraints have made the industry extremely competitive, and cutting corners has become a reality.

Over the years one critical area has repeatedly been neglected. I am talking about the one thing that actually holds a structure together — nails.

In the past, nails were hand driven. If the nail was not the right size (diameter by length), or of inferior quality, it would bend when hit with a hammer. In addition, nails were purchased by the pound. There was no incentive for the manufacturer to make and sell thinner nails.

Nail guns could drive coat hanger wire if it were manufactured to fit into the gun's chamber.

The arrival of the nail gun changed everything. Used correctly, and with the right nail, it is a highly productive tool (even though it requires little skill to use). However, nail manufacturers have used the evolution of the nail gun to manipulate the integrity of nails for profit.

This brings me to where I feel the real problem lies: the manner in which gun nails are being misused and mis-labeled in our industry.

A nail gun can drive nails that range in size from 6d (2x0.98) to 16d common (3 1/2 x 0.162) yet ALL gun nails have the same size head, regardless of the nails' structural size or quality. Nail guns could drive coat hanger wire if it were manufactured to fit into the gun's chamber. The point being, once a nail is driven you can't tell what size or quality it is. To make matters worse, power-driven nails are sold by the piece, not the pound. This is an incentive for manufacturers to produce smaller and thinner nails, enabling them to save on manufacturing costs.

When plans call for 16d, what size 16d is used? For example, 16d could be 16d framers (3'x0.131), 16d shorts (3 1/4 x 0.131), 16d box (3 1/2x0.135), 16d sinkers (3 1/4 x 0.148) or 16d common (3 1/2x0.162). Which 16d is correct? With tens of thousands of nails in every home, you see the magnitude of the problem. Secondly, most nail manufacturers utilize a loophole in manufacturing requirements (ASTM F 1667- 8.2.2) that allows them to produce nails that are plus or minus, 0.004 inch. I have measured thousands of these nails, and they are always able to keep the nails less than 0.004, but allowed to call them a larger size. For instance, the most common nail used (16d short 3 1/4x0.131) is really 3 1/4 x 0.128. What it says on the box label is not what is really inside.

If a house is designed to have 16d common (3 1/2 x 0.162) or 16d sinkers (3 1/2 x 0.148) for their structural loads, but the house is framed with 16d shorts (3 1/4 x 0.131) that are really 3 1/4 x 0.128, and there are 40,000 nails in a home, then you have a problem.

Lumber is stamped and hardware is marked, but the one thing that holds it all together — nails — are left out of the loop.

I am all for moving the industry forward through the introduction of materials and equipment that makes the construction processes more efficient and effective and profitable, but using the wrong or inferior fasteners is just plain not right.

— Steve Albertson, Irvine, Calif.

Steve Albertson, a general contractor in Irvine, has been involved in the construction industry in Southern California for 20 years. He also co-owns Trackers Color Coded Nails, a coding system to better ensure the correct fastener is used in the correct application. For more information call (800) 839-7774 or trackers.com.

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