Corrosion of galvanized fasteners: appendix

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Vented Attic Framing

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Corrosion of Galvanized Fasteners  
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Placement of Test Connection Specimens

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42 Day exposure

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42 Day exposure

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Vented Attic Framing

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F. Appendix F

Literature Review Report

December 27, 2000
LITERATURE REVIEW REPORT

December 27, 2000

SUBMITTED BY

NORTH AMERICAN STEEL FRAMING ALLIANCE
AND
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HUD CONTRACT No.: H-21248CA
PROJECT TITLE: “Corrosion of Galvanized Fasteners used in Cold-Formed Steel Framing”
CONTRACTOR: North American Steel Framing Alliance
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Washington, DC 20036
Principal Investigator: Tim Waite
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LITERATURE REVIEW REPORT: December 27, 2000
CORROSION OF GALVANIZED FASTENERS USED IN COLD-FORMED STEEL FRAMING

LITERATURE REVIEW REPORT

December 27, 2000

Section I - Introduction

This research program will investigate the potential for corrosion of galvanized fasteners used in cold-formed steel framing (CFSF) by exposing test samples to a variety of environmental conditions frequently found in Hawaii. The results of this research will aid in the evaluation of galvanized CFSF fasteners in various exposure conditions.

The project was initiated on September 26, 2000 by an award from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the North American Steel Framing Alliance (NASFA). The project includes a research effort to study the effects of corrosion of galvanized fasteners on CFSF connection behavior, followed by a final report and development of a Practice Guide for use by industry. NASFA has subcontracted the research component of this study to the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Hawaii (UH), a non-profit State of Hawaii educational institution. The principal investigator at UH is Dr. Ian N. Robertson, Associate Professor of Structural Engineering.

The project has a two-year duration with various scheduled deliverables, including a literature review report and quarterly progress reports. This literature review report presents research literature relevant to this study. After a general introduction to galvanic corrosion and cathodic protection provided by zinc coatings on steel, the report focuses on research performed on connections in CFSF structures.

Section II - Galvanic Corrosion

Steel stores energy when it is changed from its natural state into the metallic form used in industry. This energy later returns in the form of corrosion. Corrosion is therefore the natural transformation of manmade metals to their original state (National Association of Corrosion Engineering, 1984).

Galvanizing of steel is the most economical and effective way to protect steel. This galvanizing is an adherent coating of zinc and zinc-iron alloys on the surface of steel that provides long term protection from corrosion. Galvanizing of steel is accomplished by immersing the member in molten zinc. This immersion
forms a metallurgical bond between the steel and zinc coating. The standard galvanized coating is composed of pure zinc and a very small amount of aluminum. Zinc-rich paints that coat the steel framing must satisfy three important conditions for the galvanic process to occur. The zinc particles must be in electrical contact with each other. The zinc particles must also be in electrical contact with the steel. Finally, a continuous electrolyte must exist between the zinc particles and steel (AISI, 1996; Zhang, 1997).

The zinc coating applied to the steel provides a physical barrier as well as a cathodic protection against corrosion. In most environments, zinc corrodes less than steel. The rate of corrosion of zinc in atmospheric conditions is less than one tenth of that for steel (Zhang, 2000b). In fact, atmospheric conditions particularly detrimental to steel corrosion are those in which zinc coatings have been shown to be most effective (Zhang, 2000b). These conditions include marine and industrial atmospheric exposure.

As explained by Zhang (2000a), "galvanized (ie. zinc coated) steel is a typical example of metallic coating that provides a barrier layer to protect the steel and also sacrificially protects the locations where discontinuities occur in the coating." He adds that "... galvanic corrosion resulted in a reduction of the corrosion of steel by 3 times in rural, 40 times in industrial, and 300 times in seacoast industrial atmospheres." This galvanic effect is caused because zinc acts as the sacrificial anode protecting steel, the cathode. The zinc coating on the steel members carries out the cathodic protection because it becomes the sacrificial material. This sacrificial corrosion of the zinc coating is generated because zinc is more electronegative than steel.

This galvanic protection is effective over a short distance from a discontinuous edge of the zinc coating. This Galvanic Protection Distance (PD) varies depending on the environmental conditions. A PD of up to 5 mm was observed under full immersion in deionized water. In atmospheric conditions the PD is considerably smaller, and depends on the presence of an electrolyte to facilitate anodic sacrificial corrosion thus protecting neighboring cathodic material (Zhang, 2000c). In cold-formed steel framing there are often discontinuities in the zinc coating. This is particularly evident at cut ends, drilled holes and connections. It is important that the protection distance is adequate to prevent rapid corrosion of exposed steel surfaces.

Although a galvanized coating is a great protection and cathodic barrier, the zinc coating, that is part of the galvanized coating, corrodes slowly over time. The galvanic corrosion rate of zinc and extent of galvanic protection of steel is based on dimensions and environmental factors. The type of wetness and concentration of atmospheric pollutants affect the rate of corrosion of zinc. This corrosion directly affects the durability of the galvanized steel, because it leaves the steel underneath
vulnerable to corrosion attack (AISI, 1996; Zhang, 1997). According to Zhang (2000d), "the high corrosion resistance of zinc is largely due to the formation of a stable, tenacious and compact corrosion product layer during the corrosion processes in atmospheric environments. The protective corrosion product layer is formed under the effect of cyclic weathering over a period of time." He points out that for accurate simulation of field conditions during accelerated laboratory testing, it is important that wetting and drying cycles be followed to allow the corrosion product layer to form. "The corrosion rates will be high under the conditions where tenacious and compact corrosion (products) cannot form" (Zhang, 2000d) such as during a continuous salt spray test.

Prediction of the life of a zinc coated steel member depends on various properties of the atmospheric environment. According to Zhang and Hwang (2000), "the corrosion rate of zinc in atmospheric environments may vary from as low as about 0.1 µm/year in indoor environments to as high as more than 10 µm/year in some industrial or marine environments .... This means that a G60 galvanized steel, about 13 µm coating each side, would have a corrosion life of more than 100 years in the least corrosive environment but only for about one year in an extremely corrosive environment."

**Section III - Cold-Formed Steel Construction**

Cold-formed light gauge steel frames have the same corrosion issues as other types of construction materials. Moisture and pollutants can reduce the life of the coated steel as well as the fasteners. The configuration of a steel track acts similar to a channel, which allows rainwater to collect prior to construction. After construction the steel track can be located in walls that collect moisture from the ambient relative humidity. This collection of the water can produce corrosion on the track. Corrosion of the steel in the frame of a building is undesirable deterioration and has adverse effects on the structural integrity of the framing (LGSEA, 1999).

Although most galvanized steel framing in residential homes is enclosed in walls, corrosion can still occur. In time, a moisture film can form on the galvanized steel on account of the relative humidity in the air. The degree of corrosion depends on the severity of the humidity in the atmosphere. When the humidity is above 70 percent, moisture will precipitate on the steel surface (Zhang, 1997).

Light gauge steel connections are primarily constructed with externally threaded fasteners. Tapping screws are capable of drilling holes into the metal with their own threads. There are two types of tapping screw that are used in the construction of residential framing, namely self-drilling screws and self-piercing screws. When choosing the screws for the structure, two basic questions must be answered.
The first question is what two materials are going to be joined. The two possible answers are steel to steel and steel to a rigid material. The answer to this question allows the engineer to choose a head style from the many different types available. The steel to steel connections requires a head with a bearing surface on the top of the material being connected. The hex washer head and the pancake head are the most frequently used in steel to steel construction.

The second question is what is the total thickness of the material being connected. The total thickness of the material that the screw is being fastened into is needed to determine the point type of the screw. The two most commonly used point types in construction are self-drilling and self-piercing (LGSEA, 1997).

The durability of the fasteners is hard to determine and design manuals do not offer substantial guidance. The life of the zinc coating on fasteners depends on the coating thickness and the environment to which it is exposed. Atmospheric and accelerated tests are good guides for the rating and coating of fasteners used in construction. Both of the atmospheric and accelerated tests should be performed, because some coating systems passed or performed well in accelerated tests did very poor in real world applications, and vise versa. (LGSEA, 1999; Roberts 1999).

Accelerated test methods for fasteners include the salt spray test. This is described in ASTM standard B-117. This practice provides a controlled corrosive environment, which produces relative corrosion resistance information for coated metals. The salt spray test apparatus consists of a fog chamber, a salt solution reservoir, a supply of compressed air, stabilizing nozzles, specimen supports, and necessary means of control. Continuous exposure to salt spray without drying periods to allow corrosion products to form a protective layer may not accurately represent atmospheric corrosion conditions (Zhang, 2000d).

The Mebon Prohesion test is similar to the Salt Spray (fog) test but it includes a drying cycle. This wetting and drying simulates long term natural exposure. The third test is the Kesternich test that is used to test heavy industrial exposure. The test involves hanging the samples in an environment of sulfur dioxide and warm water alternated with ambient conditions. The light gauge steel buildings however are exposed to a combination of the salt spray, Kesternich, and humidity all at the same time (LGSEA, 1999; ASTM, 1998).

Section IV - Atmospheric Exposure

Atmospheric corrosion is the most predominant type of corrosion for zinc coated steel. This type of corrosion can be tested in both exposure tests and simulated laboratory tests. The type of wetting, which includes duration and form of
wetness, is important in determining corrosion. An outdoor type of wetting occurs when the coated steel is exposed to rain before erection. A metal that goes through cycles of wetting and drying will allow pollutants and corrosion products to dry on the exposed metal. In seacoast areas, sea salts are deposited on the zinc-coated metal by wind and raindrops (Zhang, 1997).

Exposure tests can be accomplished by building shelters at different distances from the ocean and observing these structures for a minimum of two years. The exposure sites should vary in topography, winds, and breaking surf conditions. A FEMA study of galvanized metal connectors used in timber framed housing construction identified three corrosion locations (FEMA 1996). Oceanfront buildings (less than 100 meters from the shore) have ocean salts and humidity that accelerate the corrosion rate of the cold-formed steel framing. Buildings that are 100 to 1000 meters from the shoreline are also prone to corrosion, but at a reduced rate. Buildings that are farther inland are not prone to ocean spray and therefore experience limited corrosion (FEMA 1996; Roberts 1999).

This report also identifies five types of corrosion exposure for metal connectors in a building. In order to study all possible exposure conditions, test shelters should be designed with each of these types of exposure.

The first type of corrosion exposure is the boldly exposed exterior portion of the shelter. This exposure consists of exterior connectors that are fully exposed to the elements. The side of the shelter that faces the ocean is likely to corrode faster than the sections facing away from the ocean. Although the connectors and exterior walls are coated with large amounts of salt spray, the exterior sections are also exposed to sunlight and rain. This exposure reduces the rate of corrosion because the walls and connectors are fully dried between wettings. Drying slows the rate of corrosion (FEMA 1996).

The second type of corrosion exposure is a partially sheltered exterior exposure. This exposure consists of crawl spaces, underneath exposed roof eaves, or exterior storage areas. The corrosion rate of this exposure is worse than that of the exterior exposure. Although the partially sheltered exterior exposures receive almost as much salt spray as bold exposures, they do not receive the cleansing rain. An additional factor causing the higher rate of corrosion is that this exposure condition has a higher duration of surface wetness. Certain levels of surface wetness can cause accelerated corrosion (FEMA 1996).

A vented enclosed exposure is classified as attic spaces. The corrosion in this area varies with the location of the connector. Connectors near the exterior vents behave similar to the partially sheltered exterior exposure. For connectors that are away from the vents, or covered by insulation; the corrosion rate is lower.
Unvented enclosed exposure similar to the wall framing and closed floor system has limited airflow and incoming salt spray. The corrosion rate for this unvented exposure is expected to be lower than the three previous exposure conditions.

The last enclosure condition is the interior living space exposure. In many locations, this area is sealed from most salt spray. The heated and cooling of this space reduces the interior humidity needed for corrosion. This exposure should have the lowest corrosion rate of all the exposures (FEMA 1996). However, in Hawaii and other tropical locations, through flow of air is used to moderate internal temperature rather than air-conditioning and heating. This will permit ingress of moisture and air-borne salt, and may accelerate corrosion of exposed connections.

Section V - Fastener Corrosion

Australian Standard 3566- Screws - Self Drilling – For the building and Construction Industries was recently adopted in Australia as the durability standard for building fasteners. This standard reviews the durability of fasteners and discourages the use of low-cost poor quality fasteners in buildings. The standard was developed and adopted because sheet metal protection systems had improved to the point where fastener life was often the determining factor in the longevity of a steel clad building.

This Australian standard evaluates the performance of fasteners by conducting accelerated weathering test. The various tests that fasteners must endure are fifteen cycles of Kesternick testing, one thousand hours of salt spray testing, two thousand hours of QUV and 1000 hours of humidity cabinet testing. Hot-dip Galvanized screws are exempt from the accelerated testing if they have an average 40 micron zinc thickness with a minimum zinc thickness of 35 microns. The standard also specifies that 40 micron zinc coated fasteners should be used for tropical high humidity environments. The standard classifies fasteners into three categories. Class 1 screws are used for internal applications only. Class two screws are used for general use, but not externally. Class three screws are for external use, but are not approved for corrosive external environments.

The Newcastle Branch of the Australian Corrosion Association conducted a major seminar on Preventing Corrosion of Building Fasteners in Australia to discuss the standards and important points in reducing the effects of atmospheric corrosion. Important presentations at this seminar are summarized in the August 1994 edition of Corrosion Management (1994).

Udo Buecher of BHP Sheet & Coil presented a paper on fasteners for steel cladding (Corrosion Management, 1994). Before the new standards, roofs were
fixed with fasteners with yellow chromate 8 micron zinc-plated self-drilling screws, but they presented poor corrosion resistance. The yellow chromate zinc-plated fasteners presented a poor performance in one to five years. In certain environments, corrosion of cladding can occur near the fasteners. Low quality plated products with reduced zinc-coating thickness represent a weak link in connections; therefore, adequate corrosion resistance and compatibility should be used to choose the correct fasteners. Inadequate corrosion resistance of fasteners were found to be problematic when the screws were not compatible with the cladding material, and when the environment of the installation was highly corrosive (Corrosion Management, 1994).

A recent Japanese study tested the corrosion resistance of zinc-coated sheets and connections in steel-framed houses (Honda & Nomura, 1999). The researchers subjected various types of zinc-coated steel sheets to outdoor and indoor environments. They report that hot-dip galvanized steel sheet corrosion rate was low, as anticipated. The corrosion rate of the indoor sheets was considerably slower than that of the outdoor sheets. These results confirmed that a steel-framed house has a mild corrosion environment (Honda & Nomura, 1999).

The durability of joining methods applicable to steel-framed houses was also explored. Tests on the durability of self-tapping screw connections were conducted. Self-taping screws with a known coating thickness of 20 microns were used to join galvanized steel sheets. Each specimen consisted of two 150x 60mm steel sheets which were connected in a lap splice using two self-tapping screws. The maximum shear strength (from tension test on the connected plates) was measured before and after accelerated cyclic corrosion tests. The accelerated cyclic corrosion tests were conducted by exposing the specimens to daily cycles of salt spray, drying, wetting and freezing. The specimens were subjected to the cyclic corrosion testing for eight weeks. Every two weeks during this eight-week test the shear strength of the connected sheets was evaluated. The hot-dip galvanized steel sheets developed red rust after two weeks; and lost all zinc coating after four weeks. The self-tapping screws that connected the sheets showed signs of red rust after two weeks of testing. After four weeks of testing, the screws red rust had formed over the entire screw. However, the maximum shear strength of the tested connections only declined slightly after eight weeks of cyclic corrosion testing (Honda & Nomura, 1999).

Daudet (2000) reports on tests of cold-formed steel splice connections using self-drilling screws. The single-lap shear connections produced a failure normally known as tilting/bearing. The failure results from bearing failure of the steel plate adjacent to the screw and from tilting and eventual pull-out of the screw threads. Daudet reports a group effect which reduces the effectiveness of multi-screw connections from the strength anticipated for an equal number of individual screws. He found that connections with two screws oriented transverse to the loading
direction had similar strength to single screw connections, while two screws oriented longitudinally had a 20 percent reduction in strength.

As similar study by LaBoube and Sokol (2000) also identified a significant group effect. However, varying the pattern in which the screws were arranged did not have a substantial effect on the connection strength. Failure of the steel plates is possible in connections with a large number of screws with minimum spacing and edge distances.

Section VI - References and Additional Literature


Corrosion Management, 1994, "Preventing Corrosion of Building Fasteners" synopsis of presentations made at Australasian Corrosion Association seminar.


**Additional Literature**

ASTM C 954 - 98, 1998, "Standard Specification for Steel Drill Screws for the Application of Gypsum Panel Products of Metal Plaster Bases to Steel Studs from 0.033 in. (0.84 mm) to 0.112 in. (2.84 mm) in Thickness", American Society for Testing and Materials.


ITW Buildex, 1997, "Management of Corrosion".


