Title:
Don't Forget Masonry During Inspections

Word Count:
360

Summary:
As with other types of construction, masonry is subject to inspection and must
also comply with applicable codes and standards.

Keywords:
construction, architecture, building codes, masonry, concrete, brick

Article Body:
Early in my career, I worked with a brick mason who declared "masonry
construction is forever." In a humorous response, I teased him saying he'd spent
too much time carrying mortar up a ladder. But actually I knew when properly
installed, masonry really is solid; it serves the construction industry well and
provides outstanding protection against the spread of fire. Given its tested
reputation, many inspectors have developed a mindset that keeps them
understanding that because masonry is fire-rated it needs no inspection, or that
all 8-inch block has a two-hour fire rating.

Consider the common misconception that all concrete block has a rating. If you
look at the UL Fire Resistance Directory, it shows the block used in a fire-
rated assembly must meet certain requirements. A 2-hour firewall requires a
class "B" block. The block alone must be constructed following certain
specifications. Its fire resistance rating is based on the thickness of the
block.

So what's the difference between a class B block and the typical concrete block
available at a local lumberyard or home store? It comes down to the required
thickness of the walls and the size of the hollow core. Blocks purchased at home
repair and maintenance stores typically have large hollow cores and are not
adequate in thickness or density for fire resistance.

So how does an inspector know if the block being used is of the correct
classification? The construction design will indicate a required classification.
Additionally, block shipments usually contain a certificate with its
classification and inspectors should ask to see that certificate.

Block classification should be checked routinely and automatically. There are

also various issues to consider before application such as the type of mortar used, how to keep the mortar from freezing, what accessories will be used and the bearing conditions and penetrations. All of these components comprise an assembly.

Indeed, masonry construction is solid and serves the construction industry well. And to make my brick mason friend happy, I will concede that it is almost "forever." However, as with other types of construction, masonry too, is subject to inspection and must also comply with applicable codes and standards.