
Rapid-Setting Eisenwall Cement Cuts Exterior Plastering Time, Reduces Cracks

By Michael Chusid

MAY 01, 2006 -- Stucco has strong consumer appeal, and three-coat plastering remains the preferred practice in many parts of the country. Stucco becomes even more attractive to builders since it can now be used to cut a week off the time to finish building. One key to this accelerated schedule is Rapid Set Eisenwall cement from CTS Cement Manufacturing Corp., Cypress, Calif., which can reportedly cut the process for conventional Portland cement stucco from 12 days to three.

"Stucco is on our projects' critical path," according to a spokesperson for a West Coast builder. "I can't plaster until after the frame inspection and the drywall loading is in place. Then, if I have to wait for ordinary plaster to cure, the interior is already taped and textured and cabinets are going in before I can finish the stucco and drop the scaffolds." But with Eisenwall, the scaffolds can be dropped in just three days. "We can get a jump on hardscaping and other work that goes in the ground. At the pace we build," he adds, "Eisenwall saves us time and money because it lets us work concurrently on the exterior and interior."

Users are also enthusiastic about Eisenwall because they find it's less prone to cracking than Portland cement plaster, resulting in fewer warranty claims for repairs. This was demonstrated at a 276-unit town home and condominium project recently completed in Milpitas, Calif. "We did the first part of the project with conventional Portland cement stucco, and experienced cracking right away. But when we switched to Eisenwall, cracking diminished tremendously," says Steve Browne, director of operations for subcontractor Quality Plastering Corp. in Sacramento, Calif.

Jorge Vera, general superintendent for Mid Valley Plastering Inc., Lathrop, Calif., agrees. "We started using Eisenwall five months ago [at a 120-unit townhouse project in Brentwood, Calif.]. If it was going to crack, I'm pretty sure I would have gotten a call by now. So far, I haven't heard a thing."

According to Conrad Bigelow, an Eisenwall West Coast sales representative, "With Portland cement plaster, building codes require a two-day wait after applying the scratch coat (base layer) before applying the brown coat (second layer), and then seven more days before applying the top coat that provides stucco its color and texture. This requires contractors to return to the same job site at least three times to work on the same piece of wall, ties up scaffolding and delays the trades that follow plastering."

Portland cement also shrinks as it cures, which can lead to shrinkage cracking. Bigelow adds, "Cracks not only detract from appearance, they allow water to enter a building and raise concerns about mold." Eisenwall contains a special cement that cures completely in a matter of hours. The same cement is used to make highway repairs on roads that have to open to traffic in just a few hours. www.ctscement.com

Michael Chusid is an architect and a fellow of The Construction Specifications Institute. He reports on innovative construction materials.