

SAFETY SENSE

Firefighters Weigh In On Fire Resistance Of Exterior Sidings

(NAPSA)—Real-world fire situations reveal fiber-cement exterior siding to be more resistant to flames than other siding products, with firefighters reporting it has barely singed in the hottest of blazes.

In St. Paul, Minn., a townhouse under construction caught fire, producing one of the hottest fires firefighters there can remember. The fire reached such proportions that two firetrucks sitting about 60 feet from the building caught fire, and trees across the street were burned.

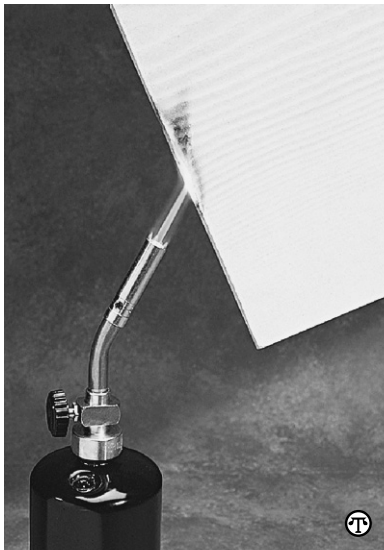
Lying undamaged within 10 feet of the destroyed building was a stack of fiber-cement siding. A building about 50 feet away, on which the siding had already been placed, also remained intact, aside from some broken windows.

“We feel that the cement siding is probably what saved the structure,” says Jack Hoffman, A-Shift deputy chief for the St. Paul Fire Department.

Lt. Eric Jackson, public information officer for the DeKalb County (Ga.) Fire and Rescue Services, says radiant heat generated from one fire will often damage or set ablaze combustible material nearby.

Such was the case at a recent fire he helped extinguish at the Eagles Run apartment complex in Atlanta. As one townhouse building burned, the vinyl siding on the building next door literally melted off in hunks, something Jackson says is common.

“Typically, if the fire is putting off quite a bit a radiant heat,



Fiber-cement exterior siding is considered by many experts to be more flame-resistant than other products.

you'll start to see a melting effect,” he says. “And then from that point, if there is some flame contact, the vinyl siding will actually catch on fire.”

For this reason, many communities refer to the Colorado State Forest Service's list of recommended building products, which excludes vinyl. Flagstaff, Ariz., is one, taking particular cautions against fires because it is surrounded by the Coconino National Forest.

When a simulated wall was needed for testing the combustibility of five decking materials, the Flagstaff Fire Department selected fiber-cement siding for

the exterior cladding of the wall. Three composite decking products fared poorly in the test and caught fire, explains Jim Wheeler, assistant fire chief. But the fiber-cement-sided walls to which the decking materials were attached suffered only minor singeing and discoloration.

“That's not from being in proximity to the fire,” he says. “That's from direct flame impingement. The fiber-cement siding did not allow the passage of fire, and it did not break apart and fall away.”

Wheeler says he was not surprised the fiber-cement products held up well. “They are essentially a non-combustible product,” he says. “They have an inherent degree of fire resistiveness.”

According to Freddy Scharf, technical services manager for James Hardie Building Products, “The product is comprised of over 90 percent cement and sand, giving it its fire-resistive properties.”

James Hardie is the leading manufacturer of fiber-cement products and maker of Hardiplank®, the siding that was involved in the Flagstaff test and the St. Paul fire.

St. Paul's Hoffman agrees fiber-cement siding is the safe choice for keeping flames at bay. “Of the types of siding we use in this area,” he says, “the fiber-cement siding appears to be the best for fire resistance.”

For more information on James Hardie siding products, call 1-866-4HARDIE or visit the company's Web site at www.jameshardie.com.