Kohta Ueno
October 6, 2022

Insulating Mass Masonry Walls:

A Few Key Pointers

Building Science Corporation

BSA | Building Enclosure Council

Wagdy Anis Symposium on Building Science

THE SUSTAINABLE BUILDING

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Course Description

Solid mass masonry buildings are a significant fraction of the existing building stock, and many contribute to the historic fabric of neighborhoods. However, with wall R-values of R-3 to R-5, they do not meet modern standards for energy efficiency and comfort. Insulating these buildings successfully—without causing long-term damage—is a vital part of the 'toolkit' for meeting energy and climate goals. This session will cover potential pitfalls and risks of interior insulation, including interstitial condensation, freeze-thaw damage, decay of embedded wood members, and surface water concentrations. We will then cover assemblies and details that work to control these risks.

The slides from a longer version of this presentation are available on BSC's website here:
-
NESEA 2022: Care & Feeding of Brick - Kohta Ueno
March 1, 2022
https://www.buildingscience.com/sites/default/files/2022-03-01_nesea_be22_care_feeding_of_brick_ueno_for_handout.pdf

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Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, participants will be able to answer:

1. Explain freeze-thaw and condensation risks associated with interior insulation of mass masonry buildings
2. Discuss potential decay risks in embedded wood members
3. Appraise various interior retrofit insulation assemblies for potential moisture risks
4. Interpret the use of material property testing and hygrothermal simulations to judge freeze-thaw risks

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Housekeeping

- Slides will be available on website (https://www.buildingscience.com/past-events)
- Resources: list of links at end of presentation
- Questions—during plus reserved Q&A time at end

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Masonry Wall Insulation Background

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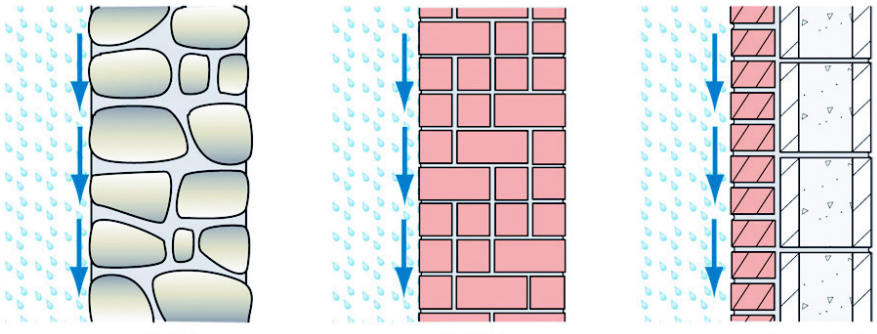
Mass Walls (Rain Control)

- Moisture is absorbed/safely stored during rain
- Moisture re-evaporates/dries while warmer
- No “drainage plane”



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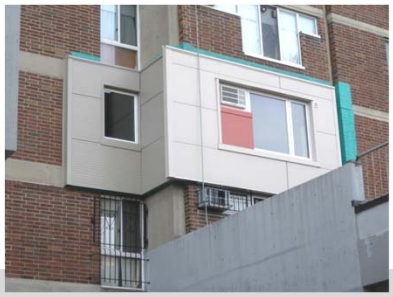
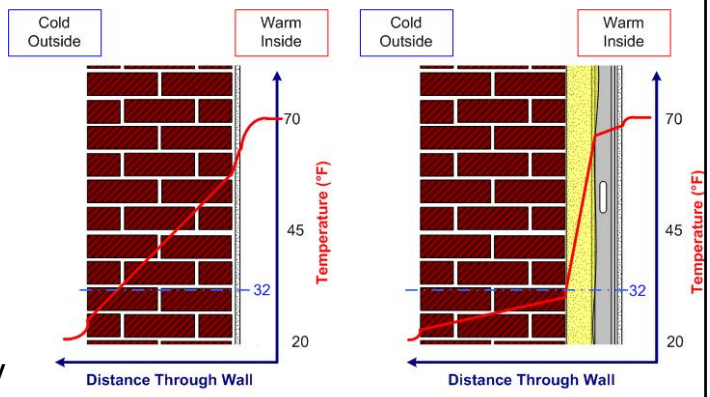
Inside or Outside Insulation?

- Insulating on exterior always preferable (masonry durability, condensation risks, thermal performance)
- Interior insulation → historic preservation reasons
- Interior → potential durability risks



Cold Climate Risks

- Freeze-thaw (colder + reduced drying)
- Air leakage condensation on interior face of masonry
- Rot/corrosion of embedded elements
- Covering interior → less early warning of damage problems in the wall



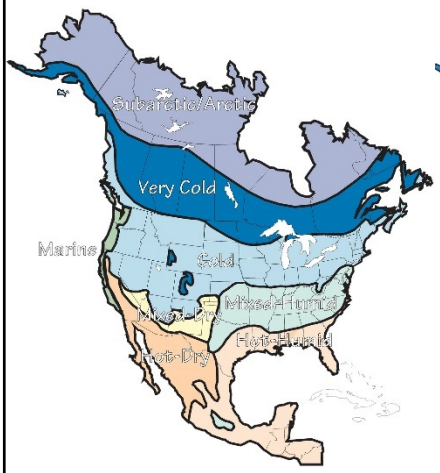
Cold Climate Risks: Freeze-Thaw

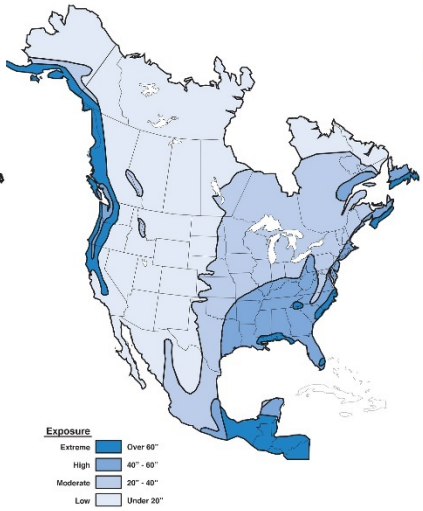
- Below & above freezing cycling (actually ~23 F)
- Soaking wet brick
- Surface “flaking off”

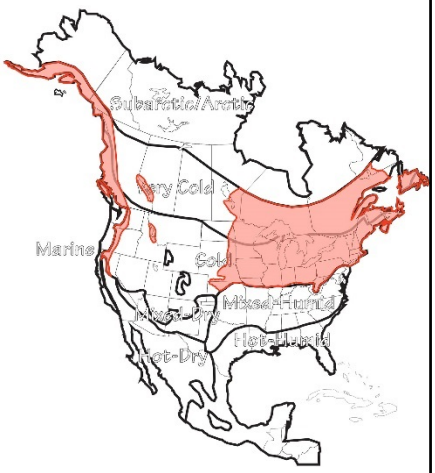
- Brick more/less resistant to freeze-thaw
- S_{crit} or critical degree of saturation measurement




Geographic Risks

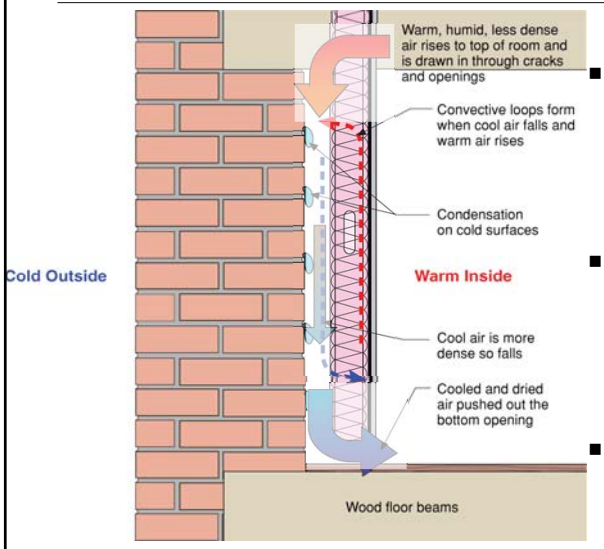






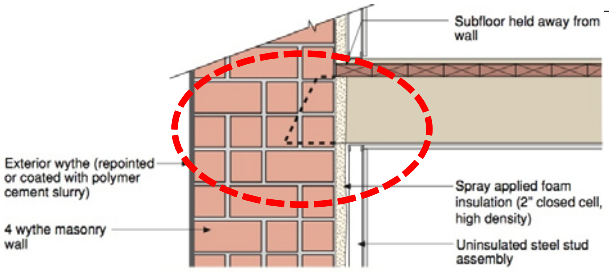
- Cold + rain = risks

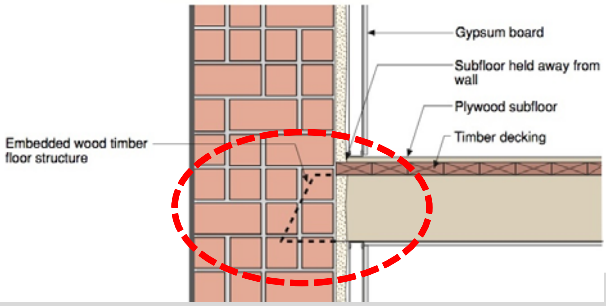
Cold Climate Risks: Condensation

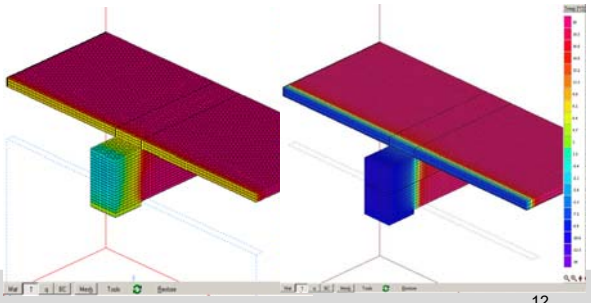


- Requires perfect workmanship at air barrier—around penetrations, etc.
- Made worse by air gap behind insulation (“chimney”)
- **NOT RECOMMENDED**

Embedded Wood Member Risks

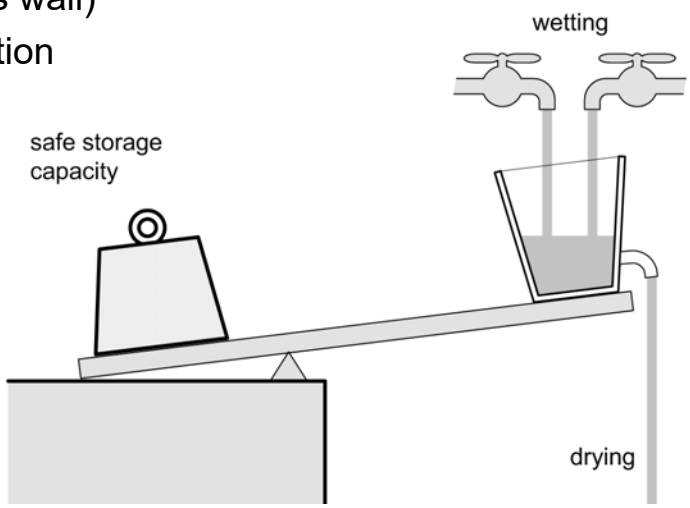






The Moisture Balance

- Large storage capacity (mass wall)
- Drying decreases with insulation
  - Less heat flow in winter
  - Inhibited inward drying?
- Reduce/control wetting to compensate



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Risk Assessment Process

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Freeze-Thaw Risk Assessment Process

In order of importance:

- 1. Site Visit Assessment
- 2. Materials Tests & Modeling
- 3. Site Load Assessment
- 4. Prototype Monitoring
- 5. Retrofit and Repair (execution)
- 6. Maintenance and Repair

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1. Site Visit

- Most important!
  - Walk around exterior and interior of the building
- Rain leaks?
  - Large/small, often/rare
- Freeze-thaw damage
  - parapet, chimney, at-grade, below windows

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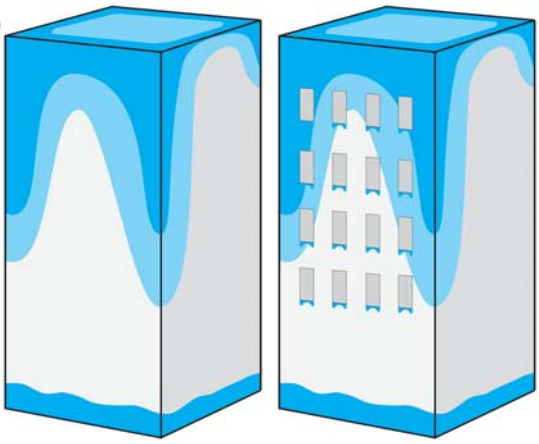
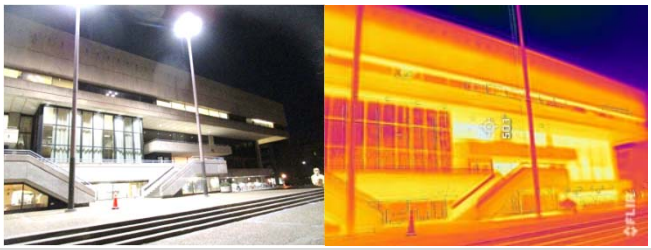
Wetting Patterns: What Does the Building Tell Us?

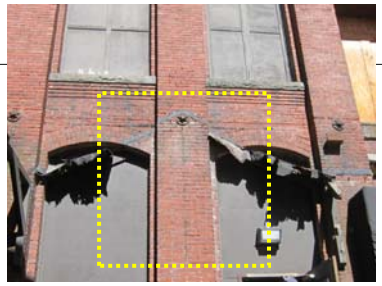
- Where to look at the building (damage)
- "Where the building touches the ground and the sky"
- Add windows
- Parapets—cold & wet
- Unheated conditions

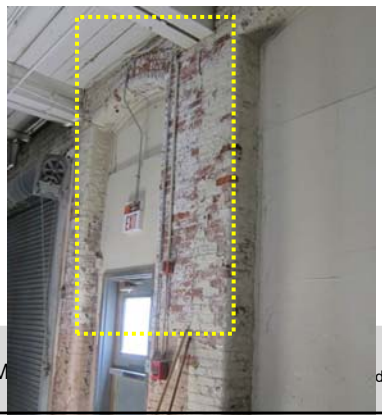




Water Concentrations

- Damage, interior and exterior





Existing Damage




- Where is it? Still active or not?
- Moisture meters to look for active/ ongoing leakage

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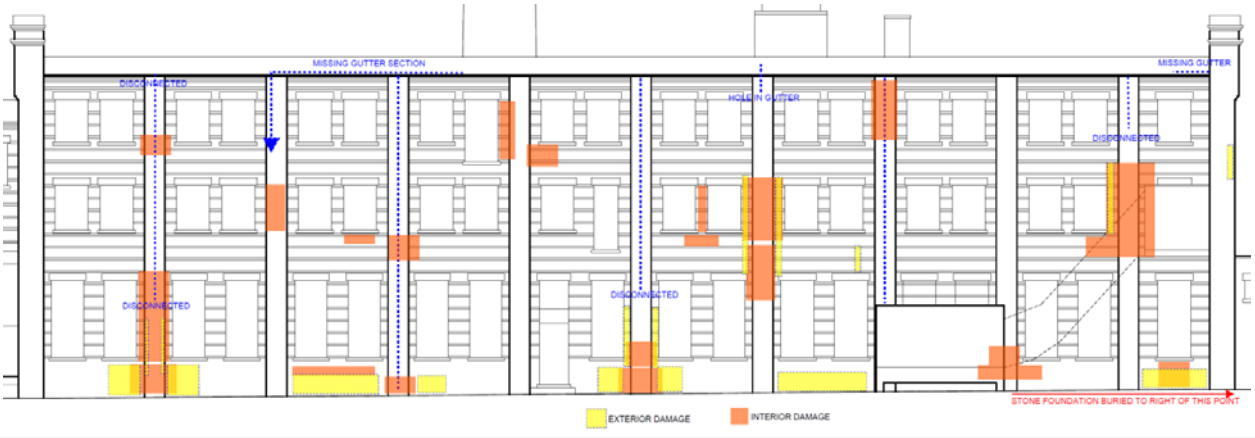
Existing Damage

- Map damage—can correlate to exterior drainage issues?
- If you can identify the source, you can fix it



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Freeze-Thaw Risk Assessment Process

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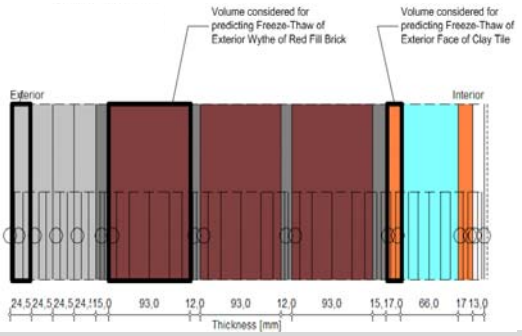
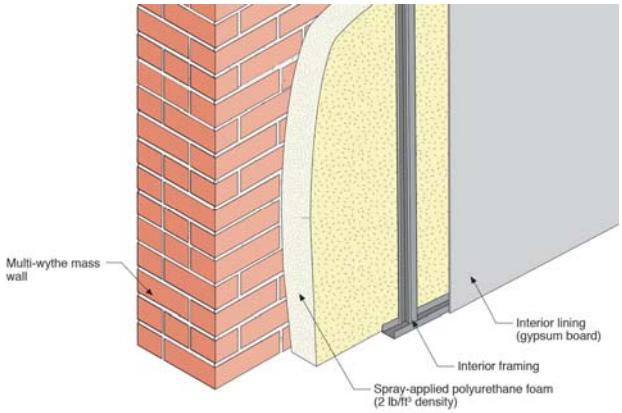


Masonry Wall Assemblies

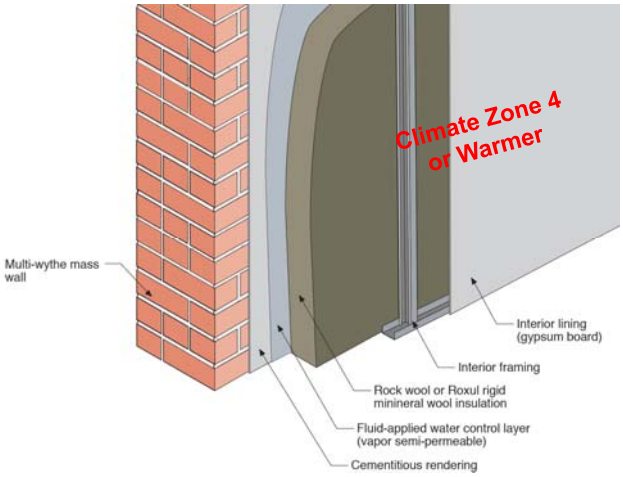
Masonry Interior Insulation Retrofit Assemblies

Closed-cell spray foam

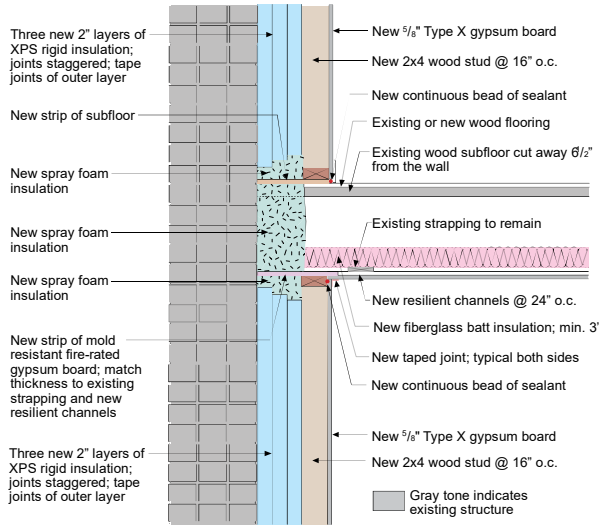


2" ccSPF? ~R-13
vs. R-12.9 2x6 stud frame wall

Semi-rigid mineral fiber board



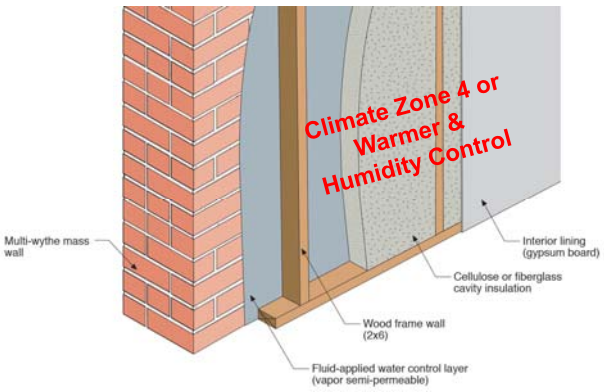
Rigid Board Interior Retrofit



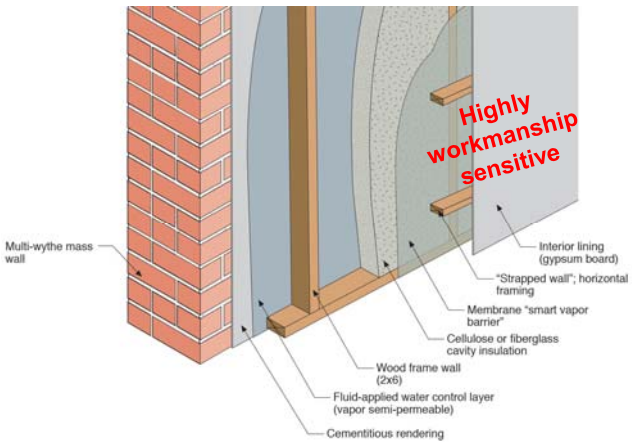
- Adhered, pin board to wall
- Much more labor (piece-work)
- Workmanship-sensitive
- Poor match for "bumpy" substrates
- Habitat wall assembly (6" XPS)

Masonry Interior Insulation Retrofit Assemblies

Cellulose/Batt & GWB



Cellulose/Batt, Smart VR, Service Cavity



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Windows

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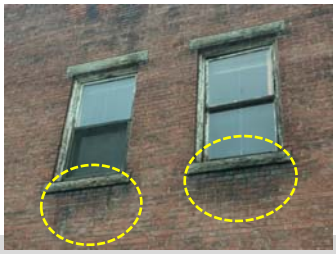
Wetting Patterns: Windows

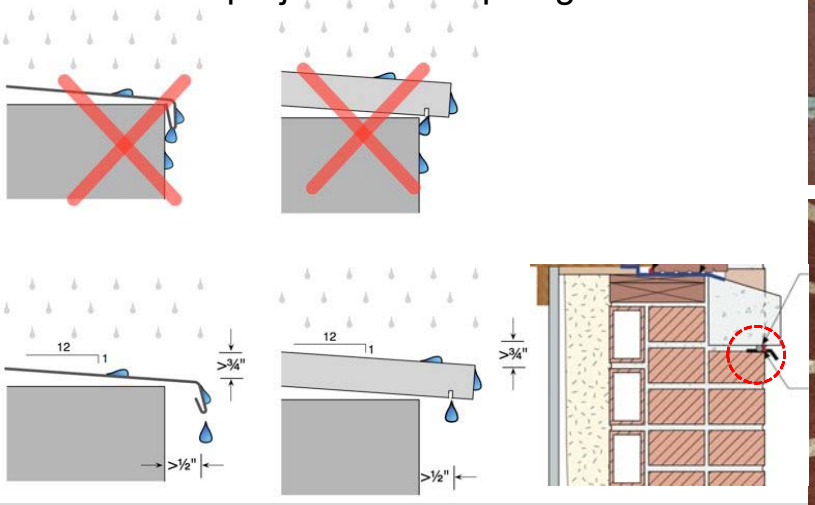


Testing Window Runoff Patterns

- Water squirt bottle testing
- Add infrared in some cases
- Often matches existing staining and damage patterns

Drip Edges

- Minimum projection of drip edge



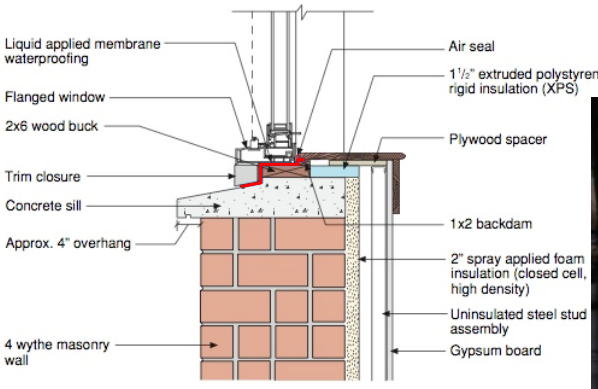
NESEA BE22 - Care & Feeding of Brick: Interior Insulation of Mass Masonry Buildings

Rowlock Window Sills

- Rowlock = many mortar joints, facing sky, taking window runoff
- Much worse water management than stone/cast stone sills
- Overclad with metal
- Add drip edge

NESEA BE22 - Care & Feeding of Brick: Interior Insulation of Mass Masonry Buildings

Windows (Potential Rain Entry Point)



- Adhered membrane or fluid applied rough opening “wrap”

Embedded Wood Joists

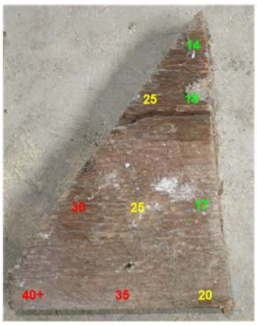
Embedded Joists

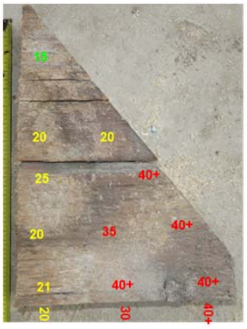



- Steel or iron bearing plates, saddle connectors
- Connecting wood to below-grade masonry → composting your framing

Embedded Joist End Monitoring Results

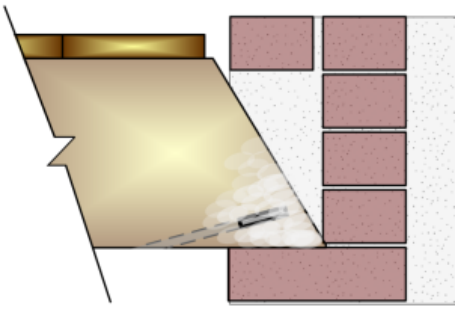
- Insulation makes wood wetter
- Heating dries wood
- Wood wettest in summer (!)
- Orientation-sensitive (N/S/E/W)
- Brick wall vs. hollow block wall
- Embedded wood is already wet (40%+ MC) & moldy in uninsulated walls
- Durability of old-growth timber
- ***Damage reported only with macroscopic cracks at masonry***

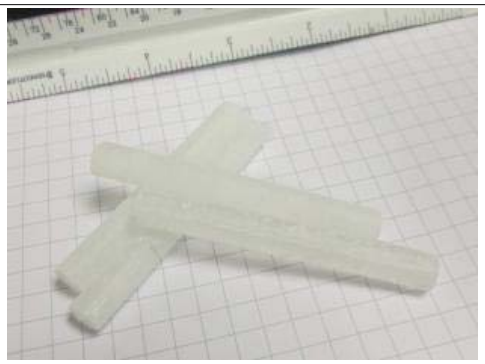





Inboard Face | Outboard Face

Borate Preservative Rods at Embedded Wood





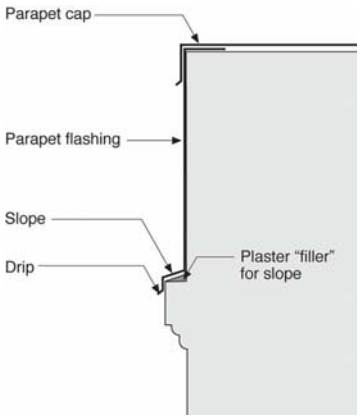
- Currently commonly used in outdoor wood/timber structures (bridges)
- Water soluble; dissolves into wood when wetted
- Drilling holes → is wood joist already punky?

Other Tricky Enclosure Items

Band or Cornice Details

- Sky-facing mortar joints will leak over time
- Injects water deep into wall

Band or Cornice Overclad Option



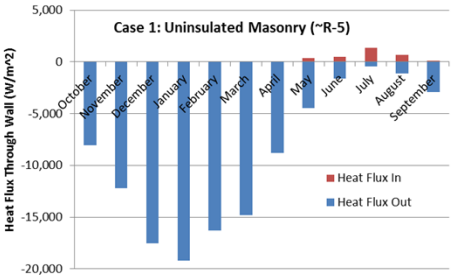
- Metal overclad with drip edge
- Water control layer (membrane or fluid) on topside of sky-facing surface?
- Historical pushback?

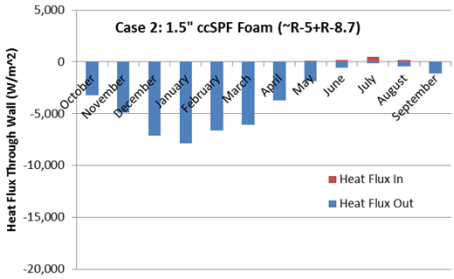
Grade Contact (Wicking Brick)

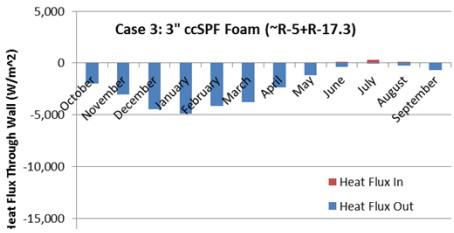
- Brick is a “dense sponge”
- Capillary wicking through brick
- Plants growing into brick = plants think your building is dirt

Energy and Thermal Performance

Do We Need to Insulate Mass Walls?







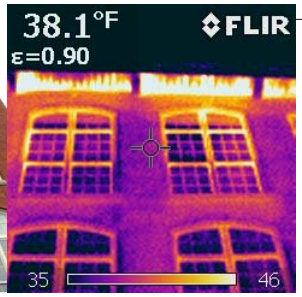
Climate: Burlington, VT

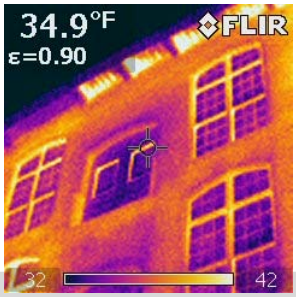
Case 2 (add 1.5" ccSPF, R-8.7) ≈ 60% reduction in heat flow through walls vs. uninsulated case

Case 3 (add 3" ccSPF, R-17.3) ≈ 75% reduction in heat flow through walls vs. uninsulated case

Mass vs. no mass → Adds ~R-1

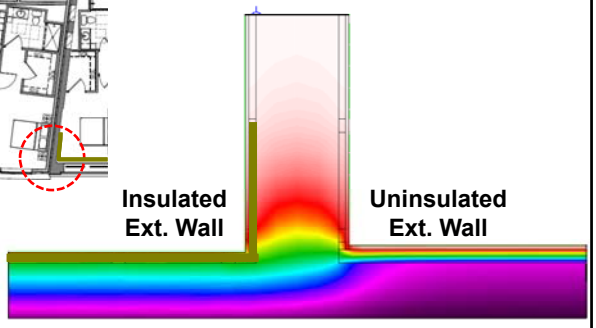
Air Barrier Issues





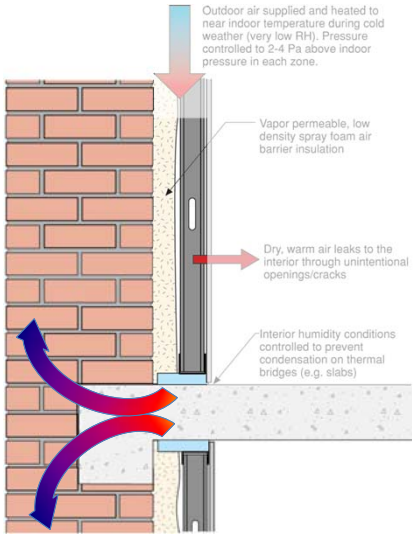
- Spray foam doesn't do anything if it is not there!
- Incorporating tongue & groove boards into air barrier → difficult
- Drilled holes at joints + seal?

Masonry Thermal Bridges



Add tee wall "wrap" for flanking loss

Thermal Bridging at Slab Floors

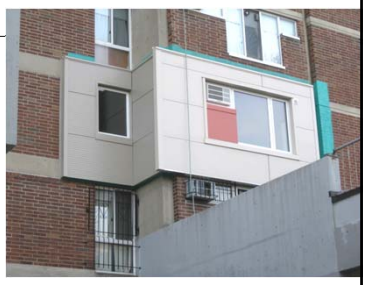


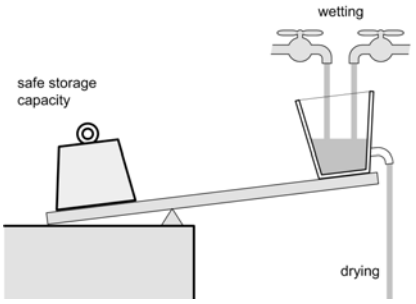
- Thermal bridge built into structure
- Can't remediate w/o "heroic measures"

Conclusions

Conclusions

- Yes, you can insulate mass masonry on the inside
- Outside is better (durability, energy performance), but is a non-starter in cases
- Balance out decreased drying with decreased wetting (exterior water control)
- So… many… details…
- Then, many options for interior insulation
- In some cases: don't make an old building something it shouldn't be (built-in thermal bridges, marginal masonry)





Questions?

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This presentation will be available at http://buildingscience.com/past-events

Document Resources

- Building Science Digest 114: Interior Insulation Retrofits of Load-Bearing Masonry Walls In Cold Climates
  http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/digests/bsd-114-interior-insulation-retrofits-of-load-bearing-masonry-walls-in-cold-climates
- Building Science Insight 047: Thick as a Brick
  http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/insights/bsi-047-thick-as-brick/
- Building Science Insight 080: Tailor Made
  http://buildingscience.com/documents/insights/bsi080-tailor-made
- Building Science Insight 095: How Buildings Age
  http://buildingscience.com/documents/building-science-insights/bsi-095-how-buildings-age
- Building Science Insight 105: Avoiding Mass Failures
  https://www.buildingscience.com/documents/building-science-insights/bsi-105-avoiding-mass-failures
- Building Science Insight 011: Capillarity—Small Sacrifices
  https://www.buildingscience.com/documents/insights/bsi-011-capillarity-small-sacrifices

Document Resources

- Building America Report 1105: Internal Insulation of Masonry Walls: Final Measure Guideline
  http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/reports/rr-1105-internal-insulation-masonry-walls-final-measure-guideline/
- Building America Report 1307: Interior Insulation of Mass Masonry Walls: Joist Monitoring, Material Test Optimization, Salt Effects
  https://buildingscience.com/documents/bareports/ba-1307-interior-insulation-mass-masonry-walls/view
- Building America Report 1508: Analysis of Joist Masonry Moisture Content Monitoring
  https://buildingscience.com/documents/building-america-reports/ba-1508-analysis-joist-masonry-moisture-content-monitoring
- Building America Expert Meeting Report: Recommended Approaches to the Retrofit of Masonry Wall Assemblies
  https://www.buildingscience.com/sites/default/files/bsc_to2_1_3_final_expert_meeting_report.pdf
- Green Building Advisor: Insulation Retrofits on Old Masonry Buildings: Building Science Podcast
  http://www.greenbuildingadvisor.com/blogs/dept/building-science/insulation-retrofits-old-masonry-buildings-building-science-podcast
- Canadian Building Digest 138. On Using Old Bricks in New Buildings
  http://web.mit.edu/parmstr/Public/NRCan/CanBldgDigests/cbd138_e.html
- National Park Service Preservation Brief 1: Cleaning and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings
  https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/1-cleaning-water-repellent.htm
- National Park Service Preservation Brief 2: Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings
- https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/2-repoint-mortar-joints.htm

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Document Resources (Exterior Retrofits)

- Building Science Insight 079: Deep-Dish Retrofits
  https://buildingscience.com/documents/insights/bsi079-deep-dish-retrofits
- Building Science Insight 048: Exterior Spray Foam
  https://buildingscience.com/documents/insights/bsi-048-exterior-spray-foam
- Building Science Insight 013: Face Lift for Old Buildings
  https://buildingscience.com/documents/insights/bsi-013-face-lift-for-old-buildings
- BA-1106: Leveraging Limited Scope for Maximum Benefit in Occupied Renovation of Uninsulated Cold Climate Multifamily Housing
  https://www.buildingscience.com/documents/bareports/ba-1106-winn-development-retrofit-community-final-report/view
- 2017-11-16 03 Castle Square - Mid Rise
  https://www.buildingscience.com/sites/default/files/2017-11-16_03_castle_square_-_mid_rise.pdf

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