

SEALANT AND WATERPROOFING ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Ontario's sealant and waterproofing industry evolves with new products, services and market challenges



STAFF WRITER

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If you could describe one constant in the sealant and waterproofing industry, you probably would use the word “change.” In recent years, the industry has shown its ability to adapt and meet evolving needs for environmental quality and enhanced building envelope standards.

Robert Montpetit, president of the Sealant and Waterproofing Association of Ontario (SWAO), says the work has become both more complicated and sophisticated in the 35 years he has been in the industry. “Waterproofing used to be fairly simple and straightforward but it’s become a lot more challenging to stay current on training and knowledge,” he said. “At the same time, the scope of the work has expanded so contracts are bigger and there is more work to be done on each job.”

Montpetit cites LEED certification as requiring both more time and more people. While the industry has been exploring the concept of a formal apprenticeship program for several years, at present training and mentorship is the responsibility of individual companies. “We end up hiring people off the streets and investing three to five years training and educating them to do the job independently,” he said.

Montpetit, president of Aquanorth Contracting Ltd., says the ground-level-up training enables employers to ensure their employees learn how to do the job in line with the company’s own policies. “You get to know people very well and train them according to your own focus, in our case with safety as a priority.”

Montpetit says he seeks to ensure that his employees understand all aspects of the company's business, resulting in greater job satisfaction and higher productivity. "People will be happier longer if they aren't doing the same thing day after day and in the end, at our company, workers become masters of their trade in all aspects of the field because of the wide scope of work they can do."

Bowie Contracting vice-president Craig Bowie, a director with both the SWAO and Building and Concrete Restoration Association of Ontario (B&CRAO), says finding skilled workers has always been a struggle and that an effort is being made to revamp George Brown College's restoration training program. "I'm part of a group working with George Brown and this is something we hope to re-activate by 2013."

Montpetit says sealant and waterproofing products are improving. Most are available close to home. "We always ask staff their opinions on new products and send that information back to the manufacturers who are usually very responsive about addressing concerns or technical problems," he said. "Sometimes they come to us with new products to test and sample before they are more widely marketed."

Several new products have been introduced to meet lower VOC requirements and suit specific needs.

"Health and safety is under massive scrutiny recently," Bowie said. "There is a huge movement to re-examine how things are done and while this is paramount, the added cost and infrastructure must be accounted for by all involved — owners, contractors, consultants, etc...., Everybody must be on board in order to establish an equal playing field."

"We were recently commended for our efforts in Health and Safety at this year's Toronto Construction Association (TCA) 'Best of the Best' Awards.," Bowie said after receiving the award for outstanding safety performance. "The award recognizes a company that treats safety protocols with a genuine sense of urgency and is innovative



and rigorous about ensuring that workplace safety is paramount."

As a restoration contractor, Bowie sees warranties as a significant business challenge. "There is a lot of competition now in the sealant and waterproofing market and while that drives new and better products it also drives exorbitant warranties," he said. "The client expectation for

warranties gets higher but they still expect the same level of pricing (while) companies are forced to deliver on these extended warranties. There is no upside to these demands and is something we as an industry need to address."

Nevertheless, both Bowie and Montpetit indicate they are enthusiastic about the industry's potential and growth and are looking forward to the future.