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(via email)

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Geo-Strata

To Whom It May Concern:

The Topaz, Idaho project featured on the cover and Page 8 of the July-August 2011 issue requires correction and comment. The implications that the use of block-molded expanded polystyrene (EPS-block) geofoam on this project was due to “Insulfoam’s innovative technologies” and that Insulfoam was the driving force behind its use are not supported by fact. Credit for all geo-innovation on this project belongs solely with J-U-B Engineers, Inc. and Terracon, both of Boise, Idaho, who came up with the idea of using EPS-block geofoam, a first for a state-owned road in Idaho. The firm of Heller and Johnsen and I have been involved in this project since late 2007 in an advisory role to Terracon. Final design for this project, including the development of a detailed material and construction specification for the EPS, was completed by mid-2008 and construction began in 2009. It is a matter of public record that Insulfoam’s sole role has been as an EPS material supplier hired by the Project contractor in 2010...a year after construction began...to produce specified material for a design already conceived and formulated in complete detail, right down to the shotcrete facing.

It is important to understand that EPS is, like most materials used in engineered construction, a generic commodity available worldwide and thus used in designs crafted by licensed professional engineers as they are the only ones legally empowered to do so. Although EPS molders (manufacturers) such as Insulfoam tradename their product for marketing purposes the fact remains that EPS blocks are essentially the same everywhere in the world and have been for approximately 60 years. Only the physical dimensions of blocks vary from molder to molder because there is no standard size. Consequently, for all practical purposes there is no room for innovation by any EPS molder because they are all simply commodity-material producers making the same generic product using the same raw material and competing on a price basis.

That is not to say that there have not been geo-innovations involving EPS and other geofoam materials on this and other projects. However, in my 25 years of academic research and using various geofoam materials in practice I have found that the geo-innovations (and there have been many) have been in how geofoam materials are used, not in the materials themselves. For example, the very first patent I found related to the use of synthetic foams in geotechnical applications (extruded polystyrene, XPS, for insulated road pavements) was granted to a geotechnical engineering pioneer, the late Professor Gerald A. Leonards of Purdue, in 1966 based on research dating back to circa 1960. Patents for using various geofoam materials as lightweight fill date to circa 1970 and were also granted to a civil engineer. Consequently, the credit for geo-innovations related to geofoams rests solely with the licensed professional engineers who craft and implement these geo-innovations.

Those interested in additional factual information concerning EPS-block geofoam manufacturing and use may wish to access the numerous publications I have available for downloading from my website (www.jshce.com).

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