

Getting Help Faster When Calling the Hotline

The number of ASCC Hotline inquiries ramps up quickly during the summer months when construction is in full swing. Bruce and I sometimes get several inquiries a day, either by email or telephone, and many of the questions can seldom be answered without more information. I once thought I could answer every question on the spot. That was never true, but now the questions have become much more complex and require knowledge of construction methods, materials engineering, and structural analysis. Here are a few examples:

- On a post-tensioned slab job, the contractor was getting blowouts when jacking the tendons. Turns out that the tendons were draped so they were too close to the concrete surface.
- On a job where low-strength cylinder tests for concrete in a wall resulted in cores being taken at the top of the wall. But important details of the coring operation and the height of the wall were missing. The cores tested low, however, we didn't know whether the cores were moisture conditioned properly or taking them at the top of the wall was a problem because of water gain.
- On an elevated flat-slab job, a two-way slope with constant slab thickness was required. The reinforcing steel was not detailed to produce the needed position in the slab and random cracking resulted. The contractor was blamed for the cracking.

On these kinds of inquiries, Bruce and I often need more input than we get in the initial voice mail or email. Here are steps you can take to help us help you more quickly.

- State the problem in as much detail as possible. Sometimes an email works better than a phone call, but phone calls do allow us to ask for missing details.
- Send copies of the concrete specifications and the General Notes on structural drawings.
- Send copies of reinforcing placing drawings, including details for sections.
- Send copies of the submittal from the concrete producer, including the batch quantities for cement, supplementary cementitious materials, water, aggregates, and admixtures--including the admixture type used.
- Give details of the conditions when the concrete was placed: ambient temperature, concrete temperature, estimated wind velocity and relative humidity, any delays in placement.
- If cracking is the issue, it's helpful if you can send photos and a map of the cracking pattern with reference to joints for slabs-on-ground, or for location of columns and beams for elevated slabs.
- For a performance problem photos are helpful in determining the possible causes for poor performance.
- Time of first notification of cracking, curling, delamination, scaling, excessive deflection, or similar performance problems. When was it first noticed relative to time of placement? And did your personnel, or an inspector, general contractor, construction manager or other owner's rep first call attention to it?
- If your customer pointed out the problem, send us emails, reports, or other documentation that describes the problem.
- If concrete testing indicated noncompliance with the specifications for concrete properties, floor flatness, or other construction tolerances, send us results of those reports. For problems with concrete properties, send copies of batch tickets for the concrete in question.
- If you or your workers were present when the problem was first noticed, give us their eyewitness observations.

We realize you may not be readily able to provide much of the information on this list. But the more we know, the better able we are to estimate what caused the problem and what can be done to fix it.