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**Impact-Resistant Windows:
Certification, Technology and Education Are Crucial to Their Future**

**By Scott Henderson
President, NuAir Manufacturing**

The past several years of strong general economic expansion have been good for the window industry in general, and for manufacturers of impact-resistant windows in particular. Although code compliance in some jurisdictions has posed challenges, all signs indicate the impact-resistant segment of the industry has enjoyed healthy growth in both popularity and sales.

In the wake of these successes, the time is right for the industry to increase its emphasis in three crucial areas – certification, new technology and education – in order to capitalize on recent gains and maintain the momentum.

Where We Are Today – and How We Got Here

The residential window industry as a whole has enjoyed several years of solid growth in both new construction and remodeling. One market research organization estimates the overall window industry grew from about \$9 billion in sales in 2002 to approximately \$12 billion in 2005 – an impressive rate of growth by almost any standard.

What proportion of this growth is attributable to impact-resistant windows is not as clearly defined, however. Nevertheless, if our company's experience is in any way

representative, the impact-resistant segment's growth rate has exceeded that of the industry at large.

In addition to the general strength of the housing market and the overall building industry, several specific factors contributed to this. In Florida, the most obvious factor was the introduction of new code requirements, which went into effect in 2002, requiring the use of either storm shutters or impact-resistant glass in most residential applications. The effect on demand was obvious and immediate.

That is not to say that a manufacturer of impact-resistant windows and doors can expect automatic success, however. One of the most significant challenges involves the stringent testing and certification requirements imposed by the new codes. Clearly, the new regulatory requirements have posed challenges as well as opportunities.

Building on the Momentum – Certification, Technology and Education

Where do we go from here? How does the window industry in general – and manufacturers of impact-resistant windows in particular – build on the momentum that has been achieved during the last few years of strong growth? From our perspective, three initiatives will be crucial to sustained growth in this segment:

- **Certification and labeling:** Obviously, safety and performance are crucial issues in this segment, and uniform product testing and labeling are essential in order to assure necessary strength – and to help consumers differentiate between products and make informed purchasing decisions. Considering the demanding nature of the Miami Dade protocols and other tests, it's small wonder that companies such as ours, whose products have passed the tests, are so supportive of stringent, uniform labeling and certification standards. In the coming years we expect to see even more industry-wide pressure to refine and enforce such standards.
- **New technologies:** At this stage in the industry's evolution, laminated glass is the state of the art in impact-resistant window design, but forward-looking manufacturers should continue to research new approaches. New glazing compounds, new glazing procedures, and new ways of configuring the interface

between frame and glass may all play a role in the future, either by improving performance, controlling costs, or both.

In our own company's case, our expansion into vinyl frames to complement our aluminum product is well underway, driven in large measure by advances in vinyl technology that improve fade-resistance, as well as the home owning public's increased interest in the energy-saving potential of vinyl windows. As energy costs remain high, we believe this will be an increasingly important factor in consumers' decision-making. Moreover, the addition of vinyl-framed impact-resistant windows also makes it simpler to provide a consistent look on the entire house, with the same materials and designs being used on windows and doors alike.

- **Education:** When the revised Florida Building Code went into effect in 2002, education was crucial for everyone concerned: manufacturers, contractors, code enforcement authorities and consumers. Insofar as our own company's experience is concerned, we found it important to prioritize our education efforts, beginning with building code officials, inspectors, code compliance officers, builders and architects. We also conducted numerous seminars and meetings with contractors and their sales representatives, explaining the new code requirements, how to look at plans, how to analyze mulling, the features of various fastener systems, limitations on glass and frame, and a variety of other issues.

Because of such education efforts, much of the initial confusion over the new code is subsiding, but continuing education is still necessary. Moreover, we expect a comparable effort will be required as impact-resistant windows make new inroads into adjacent Gulf Coast states in response to changing codes in those jurisdictions, and as energy issues also begin getting more attention.

We are convinced that a successful manufacturer must be willing to provide this educational commitment in order to participate in the continued growth of the segment. We are willing to go into an area and conduct seminars, in addition to distributing CDs and other teaching materials. We have also found it

advantageous to have an architectural staff available to answer questions, and have also drawn on our experience as installers in Tampa and Jacksonville. This background gives us a direct understanding of the installation process and an appreciation of the issues faced by dealers and contractors.

Even without such experience, however, we believe manufacturers should make the commitment necessary to support further education of all participants in the sales and installation chain, in addition to supporting code authorities and – ultimately – the homeowners themselves. Such an effort – coupled with uniform certification and labeling, and a continued commitment to researching promising new technologies – will enable impact-resistant window manufacturers to build on the successes of the past few years. Even more important, barring unforeseen economic circumstances, such efforts could lay the foundation for sustained growth in the years to come.

Editor's Note: Scott Henderson is president of NuAir Manufacturing, a Tampa-based manufacturer of door and window products for residential and light commercial applications. Founded in 1946, NuAir Manufacturing today offers more than 250,000 door and window products, which are distributed through a network of more than 100 distributors throughout Florida, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. For more information call 800-282-6627, or visit the company's Web site at www.NuAir.com.

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