

5 QUESTIONS WITH RUSSELL EDGAR

A SPECIAL SERIES
FROM **NELMA**

— BY JEFF EASTERLING

FOR THIS EDITION of “Five Questions With,” let’s pull back the curtain a bit on the testing side of the lumber industry. We all know why lumber testing is important but read on for a quick glimpse a little deeper into this segment of the industry.

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1 Tell us a bit more about what the Advanced Structures & Composites Center does, and what you do in your role:

The ASCC is a 100,000-sq. ft. (soon to be twice that with a CLT addition under design), ISO 17025 accredited facility dedicated to driving research innovation in Green Energy and Materials to create a greener, more sustainable world while bolstering economic development in Maine and beyond. This includes a team I manage dedicated to wood and wood composite products development, both for industrial and federal clients. We conduct lumber testing for the Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association, as well as have a full wood composites pilot line where we manufacture and test

products such as OSB, LVL, CLT, glulam and wood fiber insulation, to name a few.

2 What challenges do you see in the lumber industry right now?

At the Advanced Structures & Composites Center we generally focus on research and development, which means we’re often asked to focus on longer-term outputs that might occur three to five years from now. Turning the lens to the current time, price volatility seems to me at the top of the list of what’s concerning to producers and retailers alike.

Another challenge in the forest products industry is one being felt across the breadth of the construction industry: worker shortage. As younger people choose other careers outside of forestry and leave Maine, a shortage of labor in the woods is created. We could have the most modern mills in the world—and we certainly do—but if we don’t have loggers, people out in the woods bringing the trees in, we’re in trouble. It’s important to find a way to sustain the entire supply chain from the woods to the retailers.

3 What three things do retailers need to know about lumber testing?

Rules writing agencies such as NELMA are required to conduct testing on each major lumber grouping every five years to ensure design values have been maintained. This comes at significant effort and expense, but ensures built-in conservatism is maintained, wood buildings remain safe, and wood products maintain their strong reputation.

Did you know that the SPF’s lumber grouping contains 10 different species? Can you name them? Red, Black, White, Engelmann, Sitka, and Norway Spruce; Red, Jack and Lodgepole Pine; and Balsam fir. Most people have no idea about this!

And for our third item, the most recent addition to the SPF’s grouping, in fact, the first species added to a major grouping since lumber testing started over a century ago, was added in 2016. The species? Norway spruce.

4 What trends are you seeing in the lumber industry?

This is an interesting one: in the SPF’s grouping, the proportion of lumber from each of the 10 species represented changes over time. Spruce and Balsam Fir are always significant in Maine, but it’s interesting to watch the other species ebb and flow in proportion to each other. These numbers don’t affect the consumer at all, since each species still falls under the same set of (conservative) design values.