



Synthetic Stucco Creates Sales Challenges

By Rick Bunzel

Mountain View Property Inspections

Synthetic Stucco has been raising a lot of eyebrows in the real estate industry. Synthetic Stucco or EIFS (Exterior Insulated Finish Systems) was first imported to the United States in the late '60's from Europe. There has been a lot of excitement over this system and the reported failures as a home exterior. There have been many reasons given for this failure, and almost every one can be traced back to faulty installation. Fortunately, not every installation is bad but it will take some research and your home inspector to determine the condition of the EIFS.

There are many differences between Synthetic Stucco (EIFS) and old style Stucco. EIFS comes in several different types. The two basic EIFS types are barrier and "water managed." The typical installation of EIFS includes the substrate, polystyrene foam board fastened or glued to the substrate, fiberglass reinforcement mesh, base coat (usually 1/16 to 1/4 inches thick and then a finish coat. Stucco on the other hand is plastered portland cement. The Stucco assembly usually includes a substrate over the framing members (there is a 'open framing' system) with a moisture barrier present, self-furring lath, plaster cement basecoat and finally the hard coat finish. The major difference is that EIFS does not "breathe" as stucco does. Water vapor caught behind stucco will naturally pass back out versus barrier EIFS where it will not. Water Managed EIFS differs as it allows water trapped behind the EIFS to pass down and out without coming in contact with wood framing.

Both types of stucco have their advantages and disadvantages. However, it is the EIFS that has most publicity. EIFS problems have been reported in just about every state in the country. EIFS installations are more complicated and require trained installers to install it correctly. The key with EIFS is that it needs to be installed and maintained per the manufacturers specifications.

Selling or buying a home with EIFS has its challenges, but they can be overcome and a home inspector can help you. If the home has been built in the last 5 years, talk to the builder and find out who the manufacturer is and the warranty that come with the EIFS. If you're your listing the home, you may want to have a pre-listing inspection from a home inspector with EIFS experience. The inspector will need to know that they are dealing with EIFS prior to the inspection, as they will have to spend more time examining the exterior. The inspector will do a visual inspection of the exterior, especially in the areas that would have high moisture content and will determine if an EIFS specialist should do an in-depth evaluations. In an EIFS evaluation a non-intrusive moisture scanner is used to identify areas of relatively high moisture content. In areas where the scanner indicates high moisture content a probe moisture meter is inserted to test for the moisture content of the substrate and to test for damage to the substrate. If the probe moisture meter indicates high moisture content, or a soft section of wall is found, it may be necessary or advisable to conduct an invasive inspection. This will involve removing sections of the EIFS to physically inspect the substrate or framing. Sometimes significant damage is

discovered, which, if not repaired, could jeopardize the building's structural integrity.

If the EIFS is defect free, the inspector will provide a report attesting to the condition, which you will want to use in marketing the home. EIFS is not a bad system and has been used successfully in Europe for over 35 years. EIFS installations provide an efficient watertight exterior for the life of the home as long as it was installed to manufacturers specification. With a little bit of education most clients will see its benefits and the value that it brings to their home.

Rick Bunzel is the Principle Inspector at Mountain View Property Inspections. If you would like to know more about EIFS go to **WWW.MVPinspection.com** If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Mountain View Property Inspections @ 303-443-9063 or MVPInspection@comcast.net