



STATE OF FLORIDA

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

"Dedicated to making Florida a better place to call home"

CHARLIE CRIST
Governor

THOMAS G. PELHAM
Secretary

MEMORANDUM

RE: CEMENT BONDED PARTICLE-BOARD (CBPB) USE AS A NONCOMBUSTIBLE MATERIAL IN FLOOR ASSEMBLY OF EXISTING RELOCATABLE/PORTABLE CLASSROOMS

DATE: August 6, 2007

As you know, concerns were recently raised regarding the fire safety of portable classrooms. These concerns arose after it was determined that the cement bonded particle board used to support the weight of the portables' flooring is not fully non-combustible as required by the 2004 Florida Building Code. In response, the Department of Community Affairs promptly hired a consulting engineer to get answers to two key questions: (1) Are the structures safe for the children who learn in them? and (2) What can public school officials do to ensure that these structures satisfy the Florida Building Code?

Today our office received the report of the independent consulting engineer, Walker Engineering, Inc., of Birmingham, Alabama. This report provides great reassurance regarding the fire safety of the portables in question – particularly the large number that most likely are already in compliance or can easily be brought into compliance through alternative provisions of the Building Code. Please share the results of this analysis with school districts throughout Florida, who undoubtedly have been anxious to learn the outcome of this examination. The bottom line of the report is this: The provisions of the Florida Building Code, which are stricter in this area than the codes of all other states, are satisfied for most portables now being used as stand-alone classrooms.

A determination of whether any particular structure complies with the Florida Building Code can be made only at the local level based on the particular circumstances at each location, including whether the portable is used as a stand-alone classroom or whether several are clustered together to create a larger building. Local school authorities may use the following guidance regarding their portables:

- 1) For a stand-alone structure, compliance can be met with any one of the following devices: a smoke detector or a fire alarm. It is believed that the vast majority of stand-alone portables already meet this standard.
- 2) For a clustered building, the presence of a smoke detector or fire alarm and the presence of an automatic sprinkler system would allow a determination of compliance. These may already be in place at many school facilities.
- 3) Even if a portable structure does not meet the code through (1) or (2) above, local school officials may instead opt to perform an engineering evaluation of the specific building in order to determine whether it complies with the Florida Building Code or what measures would be necessary to bring it into compliance.

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It is important to emphasize that local conditions will play an essential role in determining what modifications might be needed to bring the affected portables into compliance with the Florida Building Code. We would recommend that local school authorities work with architects, engineers and the manufacturers of the portable buildings to design and implement any appropriate alterations.

You can access this report at www.floridabuilding.org under Manufactured Buildings/What's New and/or Publications.

If you have any questions, please contact Codes and Standards at 850-487-1824.