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Insulating Load-Bearing Masonry Buildings

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Learning Objectives

- Understand masonry wall interior retrofit insulation durability and moisture concerns, and solution strategies
- Understand the relative roles of thermal mass and insulation in a cold climate
- Understand the recommended assessment steps to take prior to an interior insulation retrofit
- Understand the basics of testing masonry materials for freeze-thaw durability

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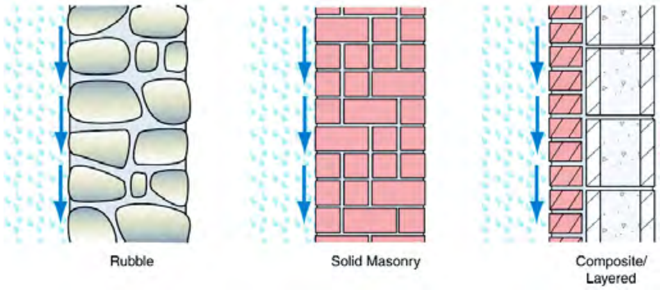
Overview

Mass Walls (Rain Control)



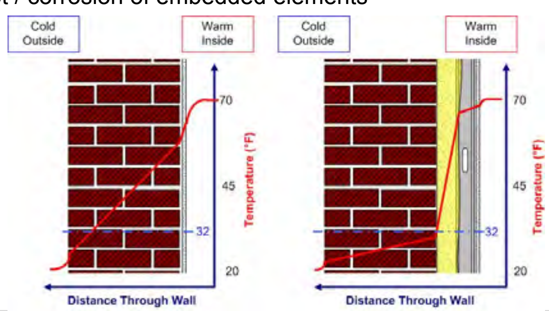
- Moisture is absorbed/safely stored during rain
- Moisture re-evaporates/dries while warmer
- No "drainage plane"

Inside or Outside Insulation?

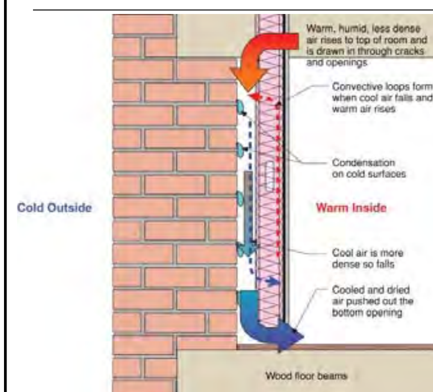
- Insulating on exterior always preferable (masonry durability, condensation risks)
- Interior insulation → historic preservation reasons
- Interior → potential durability risks
- Energy efficiency, preserve exterior, museum-level durability: choose 2 of 3

Cold Climate Risks

1. Freeze-thaw (reduced drying)
2. Air leakage condensation on interior face of masonry
3. Rot / corrosion of embedded elements



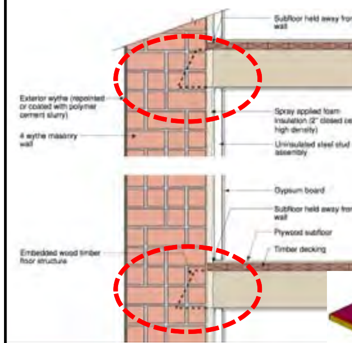
Cold Climate Risks: Condensation

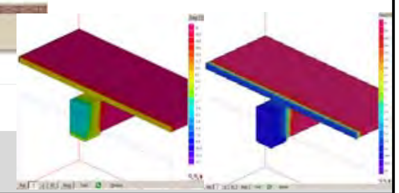


- Requires perfect workmanship at air barrier—around penetrations, etc.
- Made worse by air gap behind insulation
- **NOT RECOMMENDED**

Condensation Risks

Embedded Wood Member Risks





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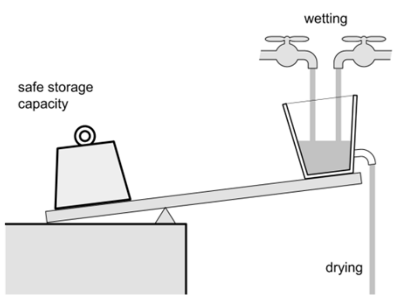
The Moisture Balance



- Large storage capacity (mass wall)
- Drying decreases with insulation
- Design should reduce/control wetting to compensate

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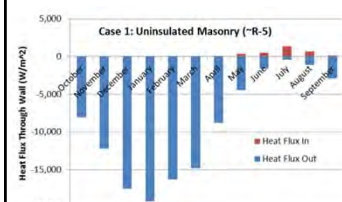
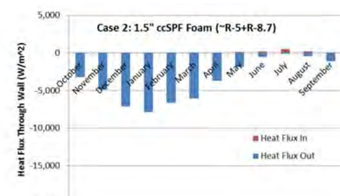
Do We Need to Insulate Mass Walls?





Climate: Burlington, VT

Case 2 (add 1.5" ccSPF, R-8.7) ≈ 60% reduction in heat flow through walls vs. uninsulated case

Case 3 (add 3" ccSPF, R-17.3) ≈ 75% reduction in heat flow through walls vs. uninsulated case

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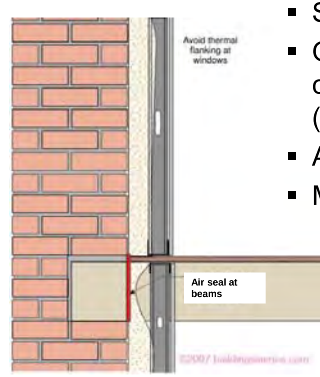
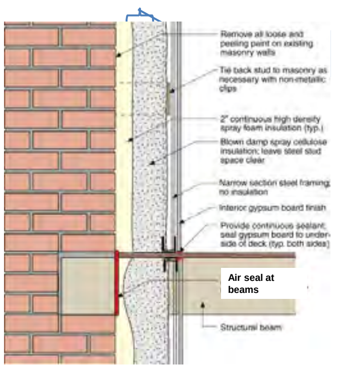
Retrofit Approaches

Recommended Approaches



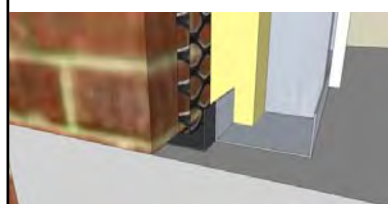
- Spray foam against masonry
- Open cell (0.5 PCF)? Closed cell (2.0 PCF)? Intermediate (1.0 PCF)?
- Air seal at joist pockets
- Montreal experience

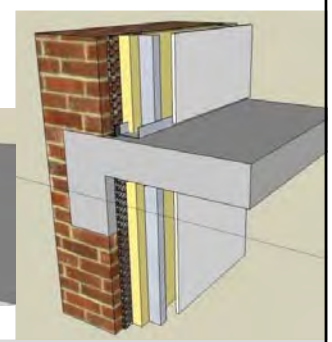
Hybrid Wall Insulation Assembly



Rain Control

- Don't change a successful mass rain control to a problematic drained one!
- Flashing, weeps, etc.





Non-Foam Options?

- Paul Knight (Chicago); Chris Benedict (NYC)—dense pack cellulose against brick.
- High-density mineral fiber & variable permeability vapor retarder
- Requires meticulous workmanship/air barrier—air barrier inboard of framing & services

Photo: Chris Benedict Photo: FourSevenFive 17

Problem Items

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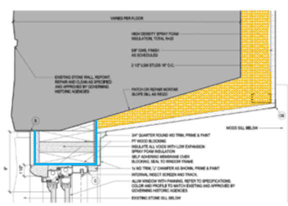
Tapered Window Openings



Minimum ~R-5 for thermal comfort (radiant surface temperatures)

Leverage spray foam for air barrier continuity to window opening

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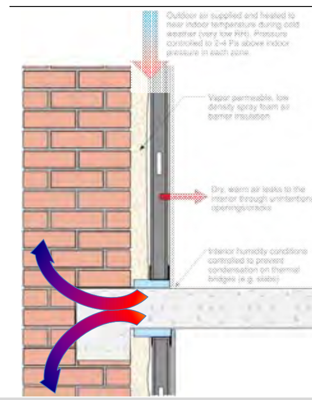
Thermal Bridging at Slab Floors



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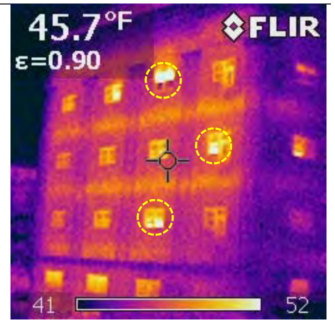
Thermal Bridging at Slab Floors



R-20 for 10 foot wall
R-3 for 1 foot floor slab
R-13 overall R value

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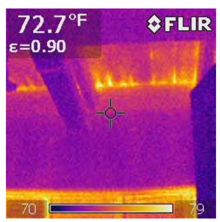
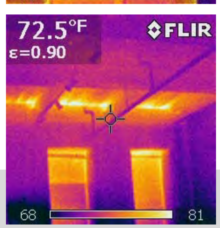
Interior Brick Exposed to Exterior

Reference: Canadian Building Digests 138: On Using Old Bricks in New Buildings

Air Barrier Issues





Can't rely on masonry alone to be an air barrier

13" brick wall, 100 sf = 3.1 sq. in. leakage EqLA

Same with 3 coat plaster = 0.054 sq. in. EqLA

Source: CBD-23. Air Leakage in Buildings

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Assessment Steps

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Freeze-Thaw Risk Assessment Process

In order of importance:

- 1. Site Visit Assessment
- 2. Materials Tests & Modeling
- 3. Site Load Assessment
- 4. Prototype Monitoring
- 5. Retrofit and Repair (execution)
- 6. Maintenance and Repair

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1. Site Visit

- Most important!
  - Walk around exterior and interior of the building
- Rain leaks?
  - Large/small, often/rare
- Freeze-thaw damage
  - parapet, chimney, at-grade, below windows

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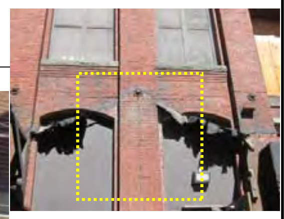
Water Concentrations



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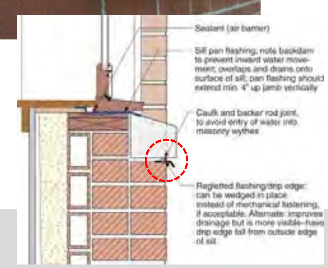
Windows (Water Concentration)



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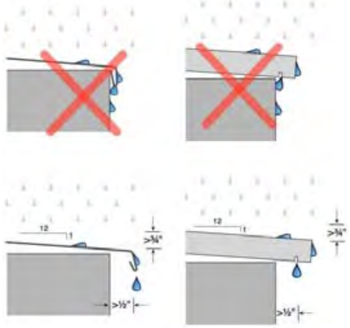
Drip Edges

- Minimum projection of drip edge



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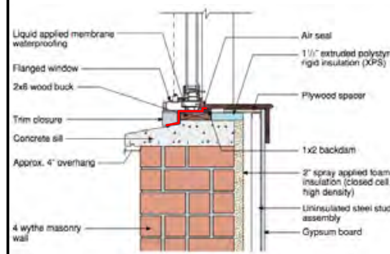
Windows (Potential Rain Entry Point)



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Existing Damage

- Where is it? Still active or not?

Existing Damage

- Map damage—can correlate to exterior drainage issues?
- If you can identify the source, you can fix it

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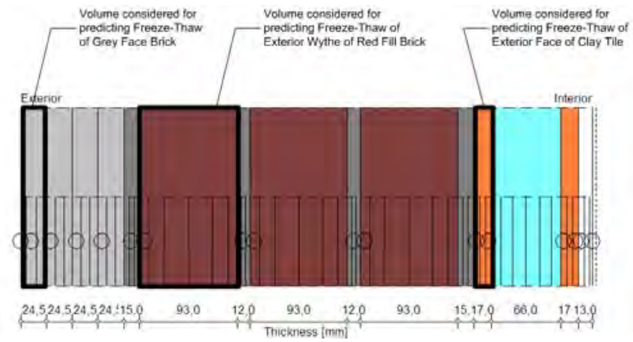
2. Materials Tests & Modeling

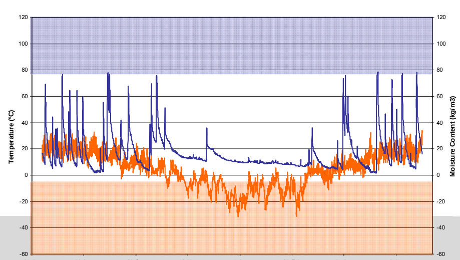
- Brick sample testing (basic tests)
  - Thermal conductivity
  - Dry density
  - Water uptake A-value (transport)
  - Saturation moisture content (storage)
- Quantitative freeze-thaw resistance
  - Fagerlund's Critical Degree of Saturation (S_{crit})
  - More details in following section
- WUFI modeling
  - Requires knowledge, experience, comparison to measured data, and real experience

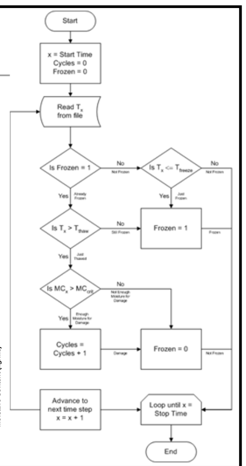
Hygrothermal Simulations



Assessment

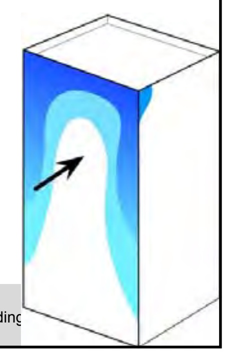
- Freeze Thaw Event
  - Brick must have higher moisture than Critical Degree of Saturation
  - Brick must freeze/thaw (<23 F and >32 F)





3. Site Load Assessment

- Assess driving rain load
  - Monitor rain deposition on building
  - Monitor run down
- Driving rain is the largest load
- Large uncertainty



4. Prototype Monitor

- Install retrofit over a small area
- Measure temperature and moisture content
- Compare wetting, MC, temperatures to model results
- Potentially could compare bricks after 1-2 years, e.g., ultrasonic transit time

5. Retrofit and Repair (execution)

- Repair masonry—repointing, improve rain control features and detailing as indicated by site survey

6. Maintenance & Repair

- As for all building enclosures
- Require a program of inspection/repair
- Mortar will often be damaged first
- Downspouts? Roof flashing? Backsplash?
- Formal manual for owner would be helpful
- Damage less visible from inside compared to pre-retrofit building (assuming bare masonry inside)

Freeze-Thaw Testing

Freeze-Thaw Damage

- The physics of Freeze-Thaw damage in porous materials is still NOT completely understood
- Several theories proposed
  - Some decades old
  - Some recent
- "Closed container"—milk bottle in freezer
- Ice lensing theory—ice "pulls" water from voids
- Hydraulic pressure theory—freezing pipes

Old Approach: Use Graded Bricks

- ASTM C62 & C67
  - Grade Bricks SW, MW, NW
  - Weather Index =
    days of cycling around freezing x annual rainfall
  - If weather index > 50,
    must use SW brick

Old Test Methods

- Method A: c/b ratio
  - c = Moisture Content after 24 hr cold soak
  - b = Moisture Content after 5 hr boil
  - SW brick if Saturation Coefficient (c/b) < 0.78 or 0.80
- Method B: 50 Cycle Freeze-Thaw
  - Freezing (20 hrs); brick in 12 mm of standing water in cold room
  - Thawing (4 hrs); brick submerged in thawing tank
  - Repeat 24 hr cycle 50 times & measure loss of dry mass; must be less than 3% for ASTM

Problems with the Old Methods

- Freeze-Thaw resistance is a misnomer
- Both A & B are digital test methods
- Lead to false positives & negatives
  - Butterworth & Baldwin, 1960s
- A is based on incomplete physics of freeze thaw
  - Closed Container (expansion of water as it freezes)
  - ~~Hydraulic Pressure~~
  - ~~Ice Lensing~~
  - ~~Disequilibrium Theory~~
- B doesn't identify critical degree of saturation

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Measurement of S_{crit}

- Critical Degree of Saturation (S_{crit})
  - European research on stone and masonry
  - Below this moisture content: no damage w. F/T
  - Above this moisture content: damage occurs quickly
- Cut brick samples; measurements
- Vacuum saturate to range of moisture contents
- Subject to freeze-thaw cycles
- Measure dilation (growth) of samples (very small!)
- "Hook" in graph signifies S_{crit}

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Preparing Test Specimens (Brick Slices)

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Saturation Moisture Content

Image: P. Mensinga, UofW BEG

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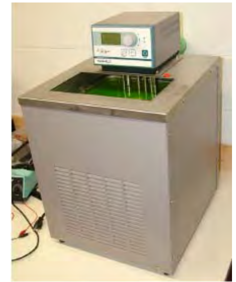
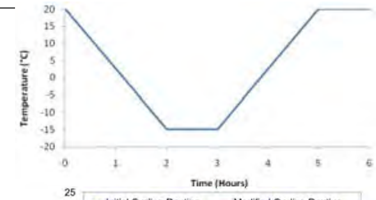
Measuring Dimensions (Dilation)

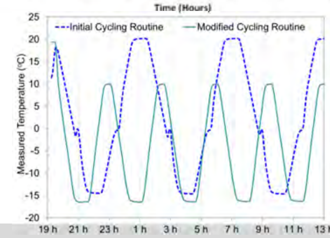
- Small dilation ~200 to 3000 microstrain
- One microstrain=one part per million (10^{-6})
- 1000 microstrain=0.1%

Running Freeze-Thaw Cycles

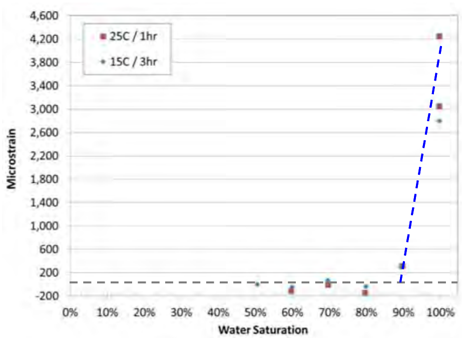




- Minimum 8 cycles
- Sometimes more to "draw out" damage



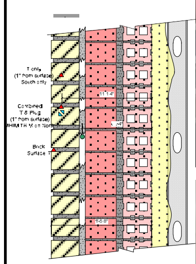
Dilation (Growth) of Samples

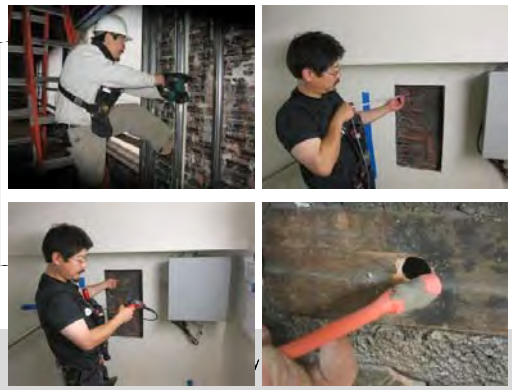


Current Research

Masonry Temperature/Moisture

- "Prototype monitoring" (Step 4)





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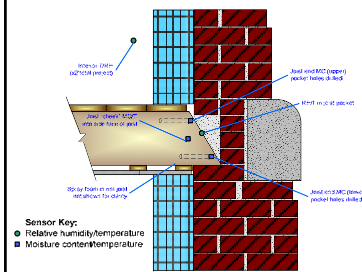
Embedded Joist End Monitoring



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Questions?

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Document Resources

- Building Science Digest 114: Interior Insulation Retrofits of Load-Bearing Masonry Walls In Cold Climates http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/digests/bsd-114-interior-insulation-retrofits-of-load-bearing-masonry-walls-in-cold-climates
- Building Science Insight 047: Thick as a Brick http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/insights/bsi-047-thick-as-brick/
- RR 1013: Assessing the Freeze-Thaw Resistance of Clay Brick for Interior Insulation Retrofit Projects http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/reports/rr-1013-freeze-thaw-resistance-clay-brick-interior-insulation-retrofits/
- RR 1105: Internal Insulation of Masonry Walls: Final Measure Guideline http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/reports/rr-1105-internal-insulation-masonry-walls-final-measure-guideline/
- RR-1307: Interior Insulation of Mass Masonry Walls: Joist Monitoring, Material Test Optimization, Salt Effects http://www.buildingscience.com/documents/reports/rr-1307-interior-insulation-mass-masonry-walls/view
- Interior Insulation Retrofit of Mass Masonry Wall Assemblies Workshop http://www.buildingscienceconsulting.com/services/documents/file/BSC%20TO2%201_3%20Final%20Expert%20Meeting%20Report.pdf
- Canadian Building Digest 2. Efflorescence http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/ibp/irc/cbd/building-digest-2.html
- Canadian Building Digest 138. On Using Old Bricks in New Buildings http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/ibp/irc/cbd/building-digest-138.html
- Green Building Advisor: Insulation Retrofits on Old Masonry Buildings: Building Science Podcast http://www.greenbuildingadvisor.com/blogs/dept/building-science/insulation-retrofits-old-masonry-buildings-building-science-podcast

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Any Questions?

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