

Concerns with steel roof decks

Seam-fastened single-ply membrane systems may be problematic

by Mark S. Graham

Steel roof decks are the most popular roof deck type used in the U.S. However, inconsistencies between design methods used for steel roof decks and roof systems are cause for concern.

SDI guidelines

Steel roof decks typically are designed using guidelines developed by the Steel Deck Institute (SDI).

Historically, SDI's design guidelines for steel roof decks have been published in various editions of SDI's *Design Manual for Composite Decks, Form Decks and Roof Decks*. SDI has revised and updated its manual a number of times during the years. For example, the 2007 edition is referred to as "Publication No. 31."

Beginning in 2006, SDI published its design specifications for steel roof decks as ANSI/SDI RD1.0-2006, "Standard for Steel Roof Deck." The 2010 edition, ANSI/SDI RD-2010, is the current edition.

Before the 2006 edition of the International Building Code,[®] SDI's design guidelines were not specifically referenced in model building codes. ANSI/SDI RD1.0-2006 is referenced as a requirement in the *International Building Code, 2006 Edition* (IBC 2006); ANSI/SDI RD-2010 is referenced in IBC 2012 and IBC 2015.

SDI's design manual and ANSI/SDI RD1.0-2006 provide for roof decks to be designed for a 30-pound-per-square-foot (psf) uplift and 45-psf uplift at roof overhangs. ANSI/SDI RD1.0-2006 also allows

a roof deck's dead load to be deducted from the prescribed design uplift load.

ANSI/SDI RD-2010 stipulates roof decks must "... be anchored to resist the required net uplift forces, but not less than ..." 30 psf and 45 psf for eave overhangs.

Also, in 2009, SDI issued a position statement, "Attachment of Roofing Membranes to Steel Deck." In this statement, SDI indicates its design methods are based on uniform loading of roof decks, such as that provided by adhered built-up, polymer-modified bitumen or single-ply membrane roof systems. SDI's statement further explains with design uplift loading conditions, attachment of seam-fastened mechanically attached single-ply membrane roof systems with wide seam spacing could result in localized loads that exceed roof deck capacity. Those same loads applied uniformly on a deck's surface would be acceptable.

NRCA's analysis

When buildings are designed, the design team's structural engineer typically will be responsible for the design of the roof structure and roof deck. If SDI's guidelines are used, steel roof decks most likely will be designed for a 30-psf uniform uplift capacity with little or no consideration of the roof system type being installed.

Roof system designers typically have relatively little knowledge of steel deck design. Many roof system designers rely on FM Approvals' classifications for designing and specifying roof system uplift, which likely results in notably different design uplift capacities between roof systems and steel roof decks.


For example, a roof system with an FM 1-90 or Class 90 uplift classification is intended to resist a 45-psf uplift load in the roof

field and higher uplift loads in the roof area's perimeters and corners. If this roof system is designed to be installed on a steel roof deck using SDI's guidelines for a 30-psf uplift, the roof deck has a design uplift capacity of only about two-thirds (or less) that of the roof system. In this case, attachment of the roof deck to the roof structure is of specific concern.

Similarly, with seam-fastened mechanically attached membrane roof systems where the roof membrane's seam spacing exceeds the spacing of the roof deck's structural supports, the steel roof deck likely has a design uplift capacity less (possibly significantly less) than the roof system. Roof deck buckling under uplift loading, attachment of the roof deck to the roof structure and, in some instances, localized excess uplift loading of the roof structure are of concern.

In many instances, steel roof decks are fabricated from steel stock with yield strengths in excess of those prescribed in ANSI/SDI RD-2010. This results in steel roof decks being somewhat stronger than what SDI prescribes for uplift design purposes. However, roof system designers should not unknowingly rely on any capacity in excess of steel roof decks' design properties.

Clearly, dialogue is necessary between steel roof deck designers and roof system designers. Additional dialogue between the roofing and steel deck industries also is needed.

Additional information about steel roof decks is contained in the roof decks section of *The NRCA Roofing Manual: Membrane Roof Systems*, which is available by accessing shop.nrca.net or calling (866) ASK-NRCA (275-6722). 

MARK S. GRAHAM is NRCA's associate executive director of technical services.

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