



By Erick Pisor

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SAN DIEGO – Dealing with construction defect litigation during construction and sometime long after completion remains a concern for developers within the building industry, especially residential.

To handle that problem, a new San Diego company focused on preventing such litigation has been formed, while another locally based firm focused on quality control, recently received International Organization for Standardization (ISO) registration.

Developer David Blackburn recently founded San Diego-based Construction Imaging & Archiving (CIA), a company that documents construction by offering its clients the ability to view daily progress on a secured online database, allowing possible problems to be identified and corrected before further stages of construction begin.

The company hires third party onsite inspectors, who on a daily and weekly basis, document all aspects of a construction project from the beginning to completion through photographs. These photos allow every party involved to track the project's progress and identify what trade was responsible for a delay in construction should a problem occur.

"Most (parties) don't have the ability to go to the web and look at a specific unit from beginning to end, or just focus on a closet in that unit," Blackburn commented.

In CIA's first projects, the company said its imaging procedures were able to mitigate exposure to future construction defect litigation costs that could have totaled more than 15 percent of the retail value of a \$39 million construction project.

According to Blackburn, on CIA's first project, a framing screw punctured a copper water pipe. The pipe did not leak immediately, the walls were closed up, and construction was presumed to be complete.

Months later the screw rusted away, the pipe burst and the leak caused flooding on several floors of the building.

In review of CIA's digital archive the time, the trade, and the crew responsible for the damagers were quickly identified. The general contractor was given the information required to hold the responsible party accountable and billed that subcontractor for repairs.

Because construction defect litigation suits are often filed many years after the project is complete, CIA maintains hard storage copies of each project's photos and reviews the photos every year for the following 10 years once that project has reached completion.

Another company, San Diego-based Quality Built, a third-party consulting firm that provides services for developers and builders announced it was the first such organization to receive ISO-9001:2000 registration of its quality assurance management system.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is an internationally recognized standards-setting body comprised of 158 member countries.

Receiving ISO certification of Quality Built's quality management system has been a 12-year dream of Beth Michaelis, Quality Built's president, who headed the year-long compliance effort.

"I work with multi-billion dollar builders across the county, and not one of them has achieved this goal. With Quality Built's assistance, that will change," she stated.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2002 Economic Census, a search on public ISO websites turned up four ISO-certified companies listed out of the more than 211,891 residential and commercial builders in the U.S.

Quality Built services include jobsite inspection of residential and high-rise developments, in which the company identifies problems that must be corrected to improve quality. Quality Built said it is the largest such ISO registered consulting firm in the U.S., with more than 1,700 active construction projects in 28 states.