

# A FEW REMINDERS... AND HOMEWORK FOR READY MIX PRODUCERS

Gaze into your crystal ball for an indication of expectations in 2006, and ponder the predictions made last year for 2005. Our economy has been steady and the prospects for prosperity in 2006 appear to be sound. Therefore, there is considerable confidence for forging ahead, to grow your businesses and strengthen your industry. Make hay while the sun shines, as the old saying goes!

The rising value of the Canadian dollar, the effect on insurance rates of the massive damage caused by recent natural disasters, and the likelihood that interest rates will increase, are indicators leading to the suggestion that the bubble may burst. Although I'm arguing against my opening premise, I prefer to put a positive spin on it.

Of course, there are the imminent elections and the largesse they will inevitably generate... economic stimulation of sorts!

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's third quarter Housing Market Outlook forecasts a drop in housing starts in 2006. Although starts in Atlantic Canada are forecast to be down about 8%, the volume still will be significant. Since rising construction costs are one factor in the decline, all-concrete construction, i.e. insulating concrete forms (ICF) and tilt-up (TU), should provide golden opportunities for ready mix producers and ICF manufacturers & suppliers to partner up. All you need to do is promote these building concepts in your area! (Homework Assignment # 1)

Although some sectors in the economy will see small, negligible or negative growth, it is anticipated that 2006 investment in construction will increase at least modestly in several Atlantic market areas. Employment opportunities in the construction industry are high and will remain so, although there are labour shortages in a number of key construction trades.

Naturally APRMCA helps in every way it can to assist the concrete industry as it moves forward. APRMCA's contributions occur on a number of fronts, but are essentially support-based.

One focus is infrastructure development and renewal, which include many types of private and public projects. APRMCA joined forces in October with the Cement Association of Canada and CRMCA colleagues to lobby 30 Federal politicians. Our message to them encouraged enhanced sustainability, investment in the "right" infrastructure for durable results, and adoption of a life cycle assessment model to account for the economic, environmental and social impacts of all stages of infrastructure investment.

APRMCA and CAC will continue their lobbying efforts with local provincial and municipal governments in the coming year. (Homework Assignment # 2)

APRMCA's service to the local construction and ready mix industry is largely through training and education, lobbying and other industry functions. These efforts should not be underestimated. The success of several concrete-related seminars in 2005 will be followed by a similar program in 2006.

APRMCA's presentations of the new CRMCA Concrete Delivery Professional (CDP) national certification program for mixer truck drivers will continue. APRMCA was the first group in Canada to organize the program, and put 121 drivers through it last spring. Following two seminars in Newfoundland in late November, APRMCA will have certified approximately 25% of its members' drivers in Atlantic Canada. This ongoing program will be reoffered in several Atlantic locations in 2006. CRMCA members across Canada have seen APRMCA's success, and without exception remain committed to this national program. The CDP program will be offered by most of them in 2006.

One hotly discussed topic at CRMCA's October meetings is related to disclosure of concrete mix designs and the development of a "Concrete Mix Data Submission Form." There has been a running debate for the last couple of years between ready mix producers, contractors, design consultants and government engineers regarding the propriety of acquiring a ready mix producer's mix designs. The arguments cen-

ter on the growing preference for performance based rather than prescriptive specifications. Ready mix producers generally prefer to supply performance concrete, based on fair and measurable performance criteria. In this system, the mix designs are the intellectual property of the ready mix producer, thus necessitating protection of these proprietary mix designs. Industry tradition has allowed for the rarely-questioned practice of handing the mix designs over to anyone who asks "because it's in the specifications," or "because I want it."

Mel Fiander, past-president of CRMCA, and former APRMCA president led the charge for development of an acceptable means of providing construction partners with the essential facts about a mix design, "without giving away the farm." The view is that ready mix operators can easily provide relevant mix design criteria to demonstrate their conformance to the requirements of project applications and the CSA A23.1/2 concrete standard. These basic facts will give contractors the information they need to satisfy installation methods and schedules that are typically affected by concrete characteristics. Owners and their consultants will be assured that the products they specify will meet the requirements for service and durability. CRMCA members gave unanimous acceptance for the format of the "Concrete Mix Data Submission Form".

The form has been endorsed by the Canadian Construction Association, who fully understands the need to protect proprietary information in

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## Connely's Dura-Notes

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