



Decoded

By Rich Rinka



How Standards are Made

Standards development made simple

Some 70 years ago, there were essentially only two window framing materials to choose from for residential buildings: wood or mill-finish aluminum, typically with single-pane glass. In 1947, what was then called the Aluminum Window Manufacturers Association issued the first industry standard for aluminum alloys, and for the structural strength of double-hung aluminum windows.

Thereafter, ongoing work by members of AAMA and its predecessor organizations in developing performance standards for windows and doors traces the evolving depth, breadth, array of features and technological complexity of window and door products. Today, the centerpiece North American Fenestration Standard covers 10 different materials (aluminum, wood and various polymeric formulations) and 45 different window types, as well as many additional performance factors depending on the application.

Yet this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. A quick look at the current AAMA

Publication Guide discloses that AAMA has more than 170 recently published or updated standards and publications currently available in electronic or printed format. These cover the gamut of fenestration-related topics in the form of performance standards, materials specifications, guide specifications, technical information reports and market research studies—not to mention educational and general informational publications. Diverse examples include:

- Specification for cellular PVC exterior profiles
- Specification for sliding door roller assemblies
- Specification for determining forced entry resistance of side-hinged doors
- Guidelines for development of color measurement requirements
- Component verification program manuals for finishes, hardware, sealants and weatherstripping

How standards are made

How does a volunteer organization enable such output? In AAMA, standards are

developed in an open consensus process defined in AAMA 120, Procedural Guide for Creation, Publication and Maintenance of American Architectural Manufacturers Association Technical Documents, available through the AAMA online store.

Organizationally, there are four levels of groups involved in the document development process. Product groups or material councils appoint committees to handle certain issues of concern to the industry. Committees often divide that work into specific tasks and assign them to task groups. A standard can be drafted to address the issue at the task group, committee or council level.

Ultimately, balloting is the means by which broad-based consensus is achieved. Once a draft is deemed complete, or at selected stages of development, the document is sent out for ballot to all members of the original developing group. Once approved at that level, the draft is then balloted “upstream” sequentially to the committee and council that the originating group ultimately reports to.

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Often, a draft will go through several iterations to reach a final, acceptable consensus version. Once it reaches that point, it is balloted to the appropriate product group (architectural and/or residential). At the same time as this product group ballot, the document is posted on the AAMA website for anyone to comment. Every comment must be resolved before the document can move forward in the development process.

When a member receives a ballot—no matter what organization is sending it—they are getting it for good reason. Members that receive ballots are being asked to look at it because their technical expertise is recognized and needed. Even if the member isn't a major part of the drafting process, balloting provides a chance to let their voice be heard on how the industry represents its products and their application. Every comment has value.

How to get involved

Currently, according to the monthly Technical Ballot Status Report issued by AAMA staff, various task groups and committees are working on more than 60 new or updated documents, including some 20 specifications. Also in the mix are guidelines for a diverse range of subjects, such as skylight selection and daylighting design, engineering analysis of fastener systems, organic coating quality control and water penetration resistance of door hardware.

Participating in this ongoing process is quite straightforward, even for new members trying to decode the path to productive, time-efficient involvement. Interested parties can start by volunteering to join and engage (in person or virtually) in the deliberations of the task group or committee addressing an issue germane to the member's particular area of interest and expertise. It is important for participants to weigh in on all ballots received. This process provides all participants a say in the scope and content of any standard or other document being developed. Start at aamanet.org/committees.

As performance goals and technology continue to change, an even more wide-ranging future for fenestration is at hand. There is plenty of opportunity to go around. Don't be left behind. ☐

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