

MASONRY

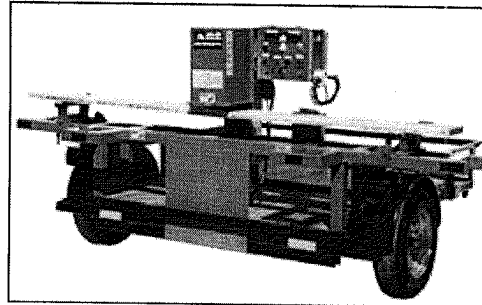
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Scaffold Plank

Side Story: New Plank Tester Assists in Inspection



Ten years ago, Carl Cook, President of Indian Mill in

Houston, needed a way to test planks before sending them to customers. After several prototypes using pneumatics, air cylinders and other types of equipment, Cook invited several construction industry, research and OSHA folks to have a two-day "skull session" on how to build an after-market plank tester that could complete OSHA and ANSI grade evaluations. This brainstorming session, along with two more years of prototypes and trials, brought together the stationary SPT-5 and mobile SPT-5M Solid State Scaffold Plank Testers.

Both models utilize only one moving part — the ball-screw motor that operates the pressure foot assembly — to minimize maintenance and hardware failures. They also have electronic testing with digital accuracy and exact measuring, the ability to do light-, medium- and heavy-duty testing, four programmable test settings, a rugged design and the capacity to test planks of any length.

"The ball-screw motor brings the foot down, and the foot finds the board," says Cook. "It's flexible, so if the board is bent up or down or warped, the foot will 'find' it, then activate a switch and put a pound of pressure to make sure that's where the board is located. This activates the switch to start the testing at that zero point and means you're doing a true test on the board."

Are there typically a lot of plank failures on masonry job sites to warrant the need for a plank tester?

"A lot? Any is a real problem," Cook replies. "When somebody gets hurt on the job, the insurance people show up, OSHA gets involved. There are always fines, inspections and other things that really bog things down. Besides that, it really hurts to get hurt."

"You could have 20,000 planks up there, but it only takes one to break to create a huge, huge problem," he adds.

Cook says that, while small- and medium-sized businesses may not be able to warrant purchasing Indian Mills' plank tester, larger businesses might be able to justify owning one. He also says that a masonry association in Montreal recently purchased one of the testers and has made it available for use by its members.

"You still have to look at the board to see if you've got saw curves, holes and rot starting," he says. "It's not the 'end all, be all,' but it's a



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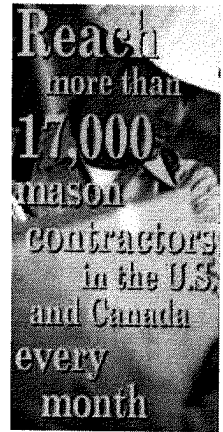
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