THE BRICK INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

TECHNICAL NOTES on Brick Construction

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Water Penetration Resistance - Construction and Workmanship

Abstract: This *Technical Note* covers essential construction practices needed to assure water-resistant brick masonry. Procedures for preparing materials to be used in brick construction are recommended, including proper storage, handling and preparation of brick, mortar, grout and flashing. Good workmanship practices are described, including the complete filling of all mortar joints, tooling of mortar joints for exterior exposure and covering unfinished brick masonry walls to protect them from moisture.

Key Words: air space, brick, construction, flashing, initial rate of absorption, joints, mortar, tooling, weeps, workmanship.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

General
- Store materials on the job site to avoid wetting and contamination
- For drainage walls, keep the air space free of excessive mortar droppings
- Do not disturb newly laid masonry
- Cover tops of unfinished walls until adjacent construction protects them from water entry

Brick
- Pre-wet brick with a field measured initial rate of absorption (IRA) exceeding 30 g/min•30 in.^{2} (30 g/min•194 cm^2)

Mortar
- When mixing mortar, use accurate batching measurements and maximum amount of water that produces a workable mortar
- For brick with an IRA exceeding 30 g/min•30 in.^{2} (30 g/min•194 cm^2), increase water or maximize water retention by increasing lime proportions within limits of ASTM C 270
- For brick with an IRA lower than 5 g/min•30 in.^{2} (5 g/min•194 cm^2), reduce water or minimize water retention by decreasing lime proportions within limits of ASTM C 270

Joints
- In exterior wythes, completely fill all mortar joints intended to have mortar
- Minimize furrowing of bed joints and prohibit slushing of head joints
- Fill collar joints completely with grout or mortar, preferably grout; do not slush collar joints
- Tool mortar joints when thumbprint hard with a concave, "V" or grapevine jointer

Flashing and Weeps
- Do not stop flashing behind face of brickwork
- Where required, turn up flashing ends into head joint a minimum of 1 in. (25.4 mm) to form end dams
- Lap continuous flashing pieces at least 6 in. (152 mm) and seal laps
- Where installed flashing is pierced, make watertight with sealant or mastic compatible with flashing
- Install weeps immediately above flashing

INTRODUCTION

The best design, detailing and materials will not compensate for poor construction practices and workmanship. Proper construction practices, including preparation of materials and workmanship, are essential to achieve a water-resistant brick masonry wall.

This *Technical Note* discusses construction techniques and workmanship and is the third in a series of *Technical Notes* addressing water penetration resistance of brick masonry. Other *Technical Notes* in the series address brickwork design and details (7), materials (7A) and condensation (7C and 7D). Maintenance of brick masonry is addressed in *Technical Note* 46. All of these items are essential to obtain water-resistant brick masonry walls.

PREPARATION OF MATERIALS

Preparation of masonry materials before bricklaying begins is very important. Specific procedures must be followed to ensure satisfactory performance and avoid future problems. Preparation includes material storage, mixing mortar and grout and, in some cases, wetting the brick.

Storage of Materials

All materials at the jobsite should be stored to avoid contamination. Masonry units, mortar materials, ties and reinforcement should be stored off the ground, preferably in a dry location. In addition, all materials should be covered with tarpaulins or other weather-resistant materials to protect them from the elements.

Wetting Brick

Brick with an initial rate of absorption (IRA) greater than 30 g/min•30 in.² (30 g/min•194 cm²) at the time of laying tend to draw too much moisture from the mortar before initial set. As a result, construction practices should be altered when using brick with high IRA to achieve strong, water-resistant masonry. The IRA of brick in the field will typically be less than that reported in laboratory tests. Laboratory test results may be used to determine if measuring IRA in the field is necessary. ASTM C 67, Test Methods for Sampling and Testing Brick and Structural Clay Tile, includes a standard procedure for measuring IRA in the field.

A crude method of indicating whether brick need to be wetted prior to placement consists of drawing, with a wax pencil, a circle 1 in. (25.4 mm) in diameter on the brick surface that will be in contact with the mortar. A quarter can be used as a guide for the circle. With a medicine dropper, place 20 drops of water inside this circle and note the time required for the water to be absorbed. If the time exceeds 1½ minutes, the brick should not need wetting; if less than 1½ minutes, adjustments to typical construction practice are recommended.

Specification for Masonry Structures [Ref. 4] requires that brick with an IRA exceeding 30 g/min•30 in.² (30 g/min•194 cm²) be wetted prior to laying to produce an IRA less than 30 g/min•30 in.² (30 g/min•194 cm²) when the units are placed. However, execution of this method may be impractical on large-scale construction projects and the contractor may consider other alternatives, as discussed in the following section, Mixing of Mortar and Grout.

If brick are to be wetted, the method of wetting is very important. Sprinkling or dipping the brick in a bucket of water just before laying would produce the surface wet condition which may not be sufficient, as shown in Figure 1b. The units should have a saturated interior, but be surface dry at the time of laying, as shown in Figure 1d.

Satisfactory procedures for wetting the brick consist of letting water run on the cubes or pallets of brick, or placing them in a large tank of water. This should be done the day before the units are laid, or not later than several hours before the units will be used so that the surfaces have an opportunity to dry before the brick are laid. Wetting low-absorption brick or excessive wetting of brick may result in saturation, as shown in Figure 1c. This can cause “bleeding” of the mortar joints and “floating” of the brick.

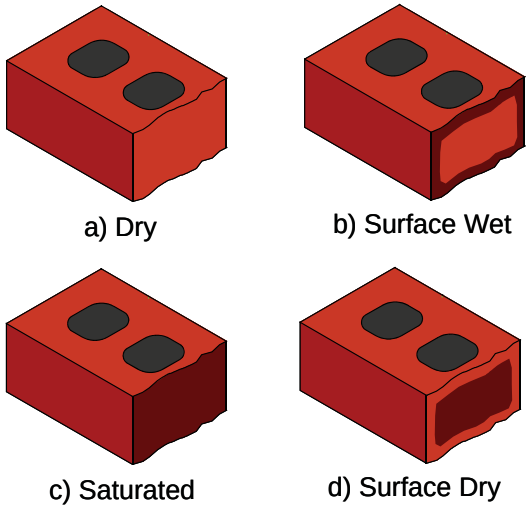

Figure 1
Moisture Content of Brick

Mixing of Mortar and Grout

Typically, a high water content in the mortar is necessary to obtain complete and strong bond between mortar and brick. In general the mortar should be mixed with the maximum amount of water that produces a workable mortar. Factors such as the jobsite environment and the IRA of the brick should be considered when determining the proper amount of water to include in the mortar.

Mortar to be used with brick that have an IRA greater than 30 g/min•30 in.² (30 g/min•194 cm²) should be mixed to maximize water retention by increasing mixing water or lime content within the limits of ASTM C 270. This is particularly important when pre-wetting the brick to reduce their IRA is impossible or impractical. Admixtures designed to increase the water retention of the mortar may also be used to improve the compatibility of mortar with high IRA brick. Only admixtures with test data showing no deleterious effects should be used.

Mortar for use with brick that have an IRA less than 5 g/min•30 in² (5 g/min•194 cm²) should be mixed with reduced amounts of water or lime to minimize water retention. Lime proportions should remain within the limits of ASTM C 270.

When brick with widely different absorption rates are used together in brickwork, it is important to maintain the correct water content in the mortar used with the different brick.

All cementitious materials and aggregates must be mixed for at least 3 minutes and not more than 5 minutes in a mechanical batch mixer. If, after initial mixing, the mortar stiffens due to the loss of water by evaporation, addi-

tional water should be added and the mortar remixed (retempered). All mortar should be used within 2½ hr (2 hr in hot weather conditions, see *Technical Note* 1) of initial mixing and grout should be used within 1½ hour of introducing water into the mix. No mortar or grout should be used after it has begun to set.

One of the most common problems with mortar is oversanding. Oversanded mortar is harsh, unworkable and results in poor extent of bond and reduced bond strength, thus increasing the potential for water penetration problems. The cause of oversanding is frequently the use of the shovel method of measuring the sand. The amount of sand that a shovel will hold varies depending on the moisture content of the sand, the person doing the shoveling and the different size of shovels used on the jobsite. To alleviate this problem, proper batching methods must be used. Measurement of sand by shovel should not be permitted without periodically gauging the shovel count using a bucket or box of known volume. *Technical Note* 8B provides detailed guidelines for various methods of more accurately batching mortar.

Blending of Brick

While not related to water penetration resistance, blending of brick at the jobsite is an important preparation task related to workmanship and the acceptable appearance of brickwork. Because brick is made from natural materials that vary in physical properties, variations in color may occur between production runs and occasionally within the same run. Modern manufacturing processes use automatic equipment which may not permit inspection of each brick, also resulting in minor color and texture variations. For these reasons, straps of brick from different cubes should be placed together around the wall. The mason should then select brick from adjacent straps when laying a given section of brickwork. By blending the brick throughout the wall in this manner, the effect of potential color variations on the finished brickwork is minimized.

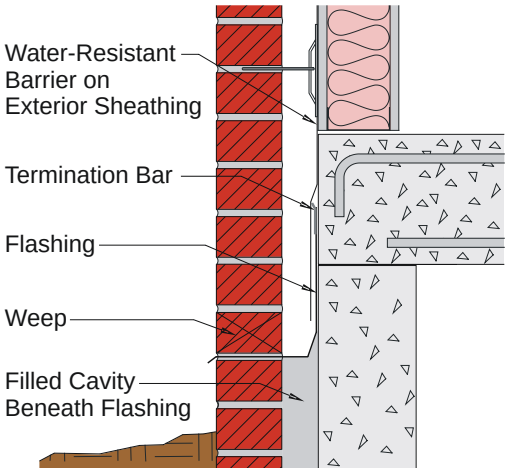

Figure 2
Wall Base Flashing Detail

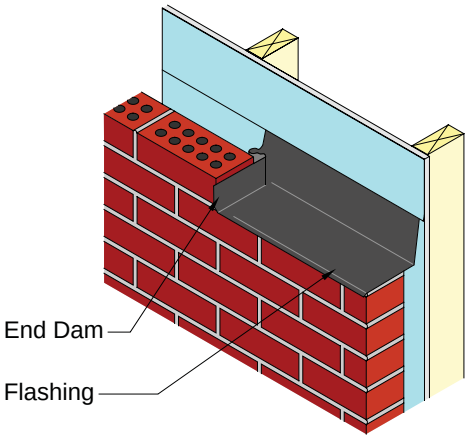

Figure 3
End Dam Detail

WORKMANSHIP

The importance of good workmanship to attain quality brickwork cannot be overemphasized. While design and the quality of materials contribute to the water penetration resistance of brickwork, workmanship is a highly important factor in the construction of water-resistant masonry.

Placing Flashing and Weeps

Flashing must be installed properly and integrated with adjacent materials to form an impervious barrier to moisture movement. The flashing should be wide enough to start outside the exterior face of the brick wythe, extend across the cavity, and turn up vertically against the backing or interior wythe at least 8 in. (203 mm). The top (vertical) edge should be placed in a mortar joint of the backing wythe, in a reglet in concrete backing, or attached to sheathing with a termination bar, as shown in Figure 2. Sections of flashing are to be overlapped at least 6 in. (152 mm) and the lap sealed with a compatible adhesive. Water-resistant sheet membranes should overlap the flashing in a shingle fashion by at least 6 in. (152 mm).

Flashing that is placed so that the outside edge projects from the face of the wall may be cut flush with the face of the brickwork. In no circumstances should the flashing be stopped behind the face of the brickwork. Continuity at corners and returns is achieved by cutting and folding straight sections or using preformed corner pieces. Discontinuous flashing should terminate with an end dam in a head joint, rising at least 1 in. (25.4 mm) as shown in Figure 3.

Flashing must be placed without punctures or tears. Openings created for reinforcement or anchors must be closed with a compatible sealant. Protection may be needed around bolts fastening shelf angles to the structure.

Weeps are required, and should be formed in mortar joints immediately above the flashing. Open head joints, formed by leaving mortar out of a joint, are the recommended type of weep. Open head joint weeps should be at least 2 in. (51 mm) high. Weep openings are permitted by most building codes to have a minimum diameter of 3/16 in. (4.8 mm). The practice of specifying the installation of weeps one or more courses of brick above the flashing can cause a backup of water and is not recommended. Noncorrosive metal, mesh or plastic screens can be installed in open head joint weeps if desired.

Spacing of open head joint weeps at no more than 24 in. (610 mm) on center is recommended. Spacing of wick and tube weeps is recommended at no more than 16 in. (406 mm) on center. Weep spacing is permitted by most building codes up to 33 in. (838 mm) on center. If other than an open head joint weep is used, be sure the weep is clear of all mortar to allow the wall to drain (see *Technical Note* 21C). Rope wicks should be flush with, or extend 1/2 in. (12.7 mm) beyond the face of the wall to promote evaporation. The rope should continue into the bottom of the air space, placed along the back of the brick and be at least 16 in. (406 mm) long.

Filling Mortar Joints

To reduce water penetration, there is no substitute for proper filling of all mortar joints that are designed to receive mortar. Improperly filled mortar joints can result in leaky walls, reduce the strength of masonry, and may contribute to disintegration and cracking due to water penetration and subsequent freezing and thawing.

A uniform bed of mortar should be spread over only a few brick, and furrowed lightly, if at all. Filled joints result when plenty of mortar is placed on the end of the brick to be laid and it is shoved into place so that mortar is squeezed out of the top of the head joint, as shown in Photo 1. After placement, mortar squeezed out of bed joint should be cut off prior to tooling, as shown in Photo 2. When placing closures, plenty of mortar is needed on the ends of brick in place and on the ends of the brick to be laid. The closure should be shoved into place without disturbing brick on either side, as shown in Photo 3.

Bed Joints. A bed joint is the horizontal layer of mortar on which a brick is laid. The length of time between placing the bed joint mortar and laying the succeeding brick influences the resulting bond. If too long a time elapses, poor extent of bond will result. Brick should be laid within 1 minute or so after the mortar is placed.

For solid brick, bed joints should be constructed without deep furrowing of the mortar, as full bed joints (covering the entire bedding surface) are an inherent requirement for water-resistant brick masonry construction. For hollow brick, bed joints may be laid with face shell bedding (mortar placed only on the front and back face shells). Both face shells must be completely covered with mortar.

Photo 1
Shoving Brick into Place

Photo 2
Cutting Excess Mortar

Photo 3
Placing the Closure

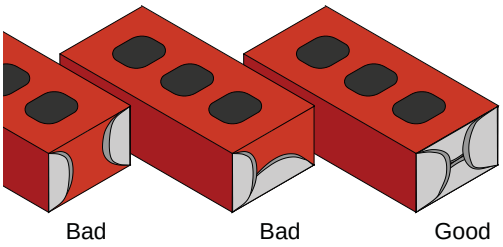

Figure 4
Head Joints

Head Joints. A head joint, sometimes called a cross joint, is the vertical mortar joint between two brick. For both solid and hollow brick it is important that head joints be completely filled. The best head joints are formed by completely buttering the ends of the brick with mortar and shoving the brick into place against previously laid brick.

Photo 4
Concave Mortar Joints

Photo 5
"V" Mortar Joints

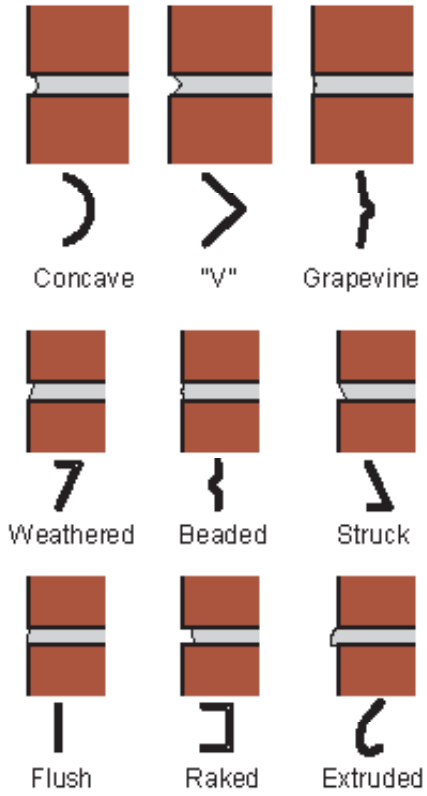

Figure 5
Typical Mortar Joints

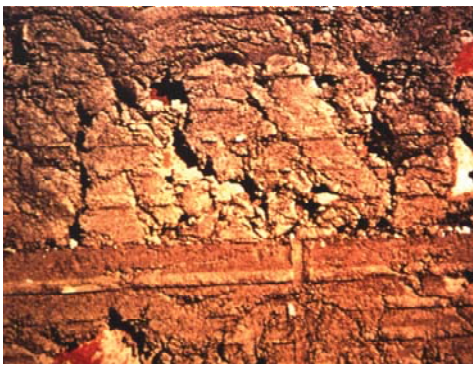

Photo 6
Poorly Filled Collar Joint

"Slushing" ("throwing" mortar into the joint with the edge of a trowel) does not adequately fill joints or compact the mortar, resulting in joints that are less resistant to water penetration. The results of head joint forming are shown in Figure 4.

Tooling of Mortar Joints

Proper tooling, or "striking", of mortar joints helps seal the wall surface against moisture penetration. Mortar joints should be tooled when they are "thumbprint" hard, (pressing the thumb into the mortar leaves an indentation, but no mortar is transferred to the thumb) with a jointer slightly larger than the joint. It is important that joints are tooled at the appropriate time as this affects both their effectiveness and appearance. Joints that are tooled too early often smear and result in rough joints. If tooling is delayed too long the surface of the joint cannot be properly compressed and sealed to the adjacent brick. Each portion of the completed brickwork should be allowed to set for the same amount of time before tooling in order to ensure a uniform mortar shade. Early tooling often results in joints of a lighter color. Later tooling results in darker shades.

Concave, "V" and grapevine joints best resist water penetration in exterior brickwork. These joints produce a more dense and weathertight surface, as the mortar is pressed against the brick, as shown in Photos 4 and 5. For interior masonry work, other joints such as the weathered, beaded, struck, flush, raked or extruded joints shown in Figure 5 can also be used.

Collar Joints

The vertical, longitudinal joint between wythes of masonry is called a collar joint. The manner in which these joints are filled is very important. Grouting is the most effective method of ensuring that collar joints are completely filled. However, grouting spaces less than ¾ in. (19.1 mm) is not permitted. Mortar protrusions (fins) that extend more than ½ in. (12.7 mm) into a cell or cavity that will be grouted must be removed prior to grouting. For mortar-filled collar joints, the outer face of the inner masonry wythe should be parged and the back of brick in the exterior wythe buttered in order to fill the collar joint.

"Slushing" of collar joints is not effective since it does not completely fill all voids in the joint, as shown in Photo 6. Frequently, the mortar is

caught and held before it reaches the bottom of the joint, leaving openings between the face brick and the backing. Even when this space is filled, there is no way to compact the mortar. The mortar does not bond with the brick over its entire surface and channels are left between the mortar and the brick. Some of these channels may allow water to reach the back of the wall. A properly constructed collar joint is completely filled with grout or mortar.

Parging

Parging is the process of applying a coat of portland cement mortar to masonry. Parging the outer face of the inner wythe of a multiwythe wall with Type M or S mortar as damp proofing may help resist rain penetration and can also reduce air leakage. Membranes or liquid-applied materials usually provide superior performance to parging, which will crack if the wythe cracks. However, parging can provide a smooth base for these materials. If parging alone is to resist water penetration, proper curing is necessary to reduce shrinkage cracks. Parging the back side of the exterior wythe is not recommended for drainage-type walls, as this may result in more debris in the air space or break the brick/mortar bond.

The face of the wall to be parged must not have any mortar protrusions. Protruding mortar can cause bond breaks in the parge coat, resulting in a leaky wall. When applied in multiple layers, each should be a minimum thickness of ¼ in. (6.4 mm). The first coat should be allowed to partially set, roughened, and allowed to cure for 24 hours. It is then moistened for application of the second coat. The parged surface should be troweled smooth so that it sheds water easily. When completed in adjacent areas, the edges of the parging should be feathered and new parging should overlap existing parging by a minimum of 6 in. (152 mm). Lap joints should be spaced no closer than 6 feet (1.83 m).

Keeping Air Spaces Clean

In a drainage wall system, such as a cavity wall or an anchored veneer wall, it is essential that the air space be kept clean. If it is not, mortar droppings may clog the weeps, protrusions may span the air space and water penetration to the interior may occur.

To the greatest extent possible, mortar droppings should be prevented from falling into the air space or cavity. An aid to prevent this is to bevel the bed joint away from the air space or cavity, as shown in Figure 6. When brick are laid on a beveled bed joint, a minimum of mortar is squeezed out of the joint, as shown in Photo 7. The mortar squeezed from the joints on the air space or cavity side may be troweled onto the units. This same procedure may be used for laying the exterior wythes of grouted and reinforced brick cavity walls.

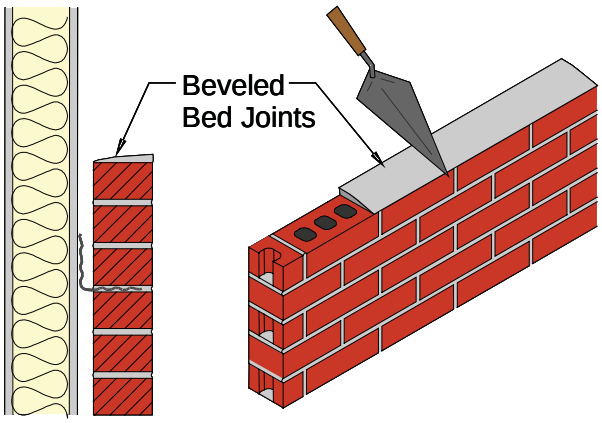

Figure 6
Beveled Bed Joints

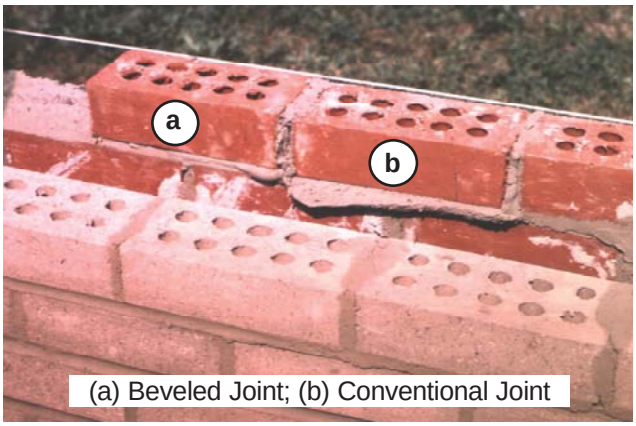

Photo 7
Beveled and Conventional Mortar Joints

Another method allows access to the base of the cavity for cleaning. When the brickwork is initially constructed, every third brick or so in the course above the flashing of the exterior wythe is omitted. Once the brickwork is complete, mortar droppings at the base of the cavity can be easily removed and weeps provided when the omitted brick are placed in the wall with mortar.

Alternately, a wooden or metal strip, slightly smaller than the cavity width, can be placed in the air space. This strip rests on the wall ties as the wall is built. Wire or rope is attached to the strip so the strip can be lifted out as the mason builds the wall. Care should be taken when raising or removing the strip to not disturb the brickwork.

Drainage materials and mortar dropping control devices may also be used to keep the air space adjacent to the weeps free from mortar. Use of these devices does not guarantee that bridging of the air space will not occur, thus the amount of mortar droppings should be limited as much as possible.

Disturbance of Newly Laid Masonry

Newly laid brick should never be pushed, shoved, tapped or otherwise disturbed once they are laid in their final position and the mortar has begun to set. Any disturbance at this point will break the bond and may lead to a leak. If adjustments are necessary, the incorrectly placed brick should be removed and re-laid in fresh mortar.

Protection of Unfinished Brickwork

Covering of masonry walls at the end of each work day, and especially in times of inclement weather, is essential for satisfactory performance. Covering unfinished walls with tarpaulins or other water-resistant materials, securely tied or weighted in position, should be rigorously enforced. Mortar boards, scaffold planks and light plastic sheets weighted with brick should not be accepted as suitable cover. Metal clamps, similar to bicycle clips, are commercially available in a variety of sizes to meet various wall thicknesses. These are used in conjunction with plastic sheets or water-repellent tarpaulins and offer excellent protection for extended periods of time.

Tops of walls should also be covered after the mason's work is finished if a permanent coping is not attached immediately after the brickwork is completed. Protection of openings in brickwork such as those for windows, movement joints, etc. should also be considered as they may allow moisture ingress from rain and snow and can lead to moisture-related problems such as efflorescence, and in some cases could affect the final mortar color.

SUMMARY

Quality construction practices and good workmanship are essential to achieve brickwork that is resistant to water penetration. This *Technical Note* does not cover all construction practices, but describes material storage and preparation procedures, construction practices and installation techniques that are indicative of high quality and, when combined with proper design, detailing and materials, result in brickwork that is resistant to water penetration.

> *The information and suggestions contained in this* Technical Note *are based on the available data and the combined experience of engineering staff and members of the Brick Industry Association. The information contained herein must be used in conjunction with good technical judgment and a basic understanding of the properties of brick masonry. Final decisions on the use of the information contained in this* Technical Note *are not within the purview of the Brick Industry Association and must rest with the project architect, engineer and owner.*

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