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Golden Eagles and SPF

By Jessica A. Baris

In Paragould, Arkansas, the lands are flat and the winds are strong. That wasn't of help to the crewmembers of Milan Decorators Incorporated, who were in the process of applying spray polyurethane foam (SPF) to the exterior walls of the newly constructed Golden Eagles High School. To combat the winds, the crew built containment boxes around the aerial lifts to prevent overspray from taking off to places it didn't need to go.

"We had to take extreme care to check the wind speed of the day," says Michael Fitzgerald, estimator and project manager for Milan Decorators.

The containment boxes were made of metal studs or wood framing with thick plastic wrapped around it. "It looked like a little box house," says Fitzgerald. "We built the box cage 4 feet away from the lift cage that the sprayer was in. It was flush with the wall so there wouldn't be any gaps and it gave him arm-length room to spray."

Milan Decorators, a family-owned and -operated business, was started up in 1959 by Fitzgerald's grandfather. At first, the business specialized in commercial and industrial coatings and dry wall, but entered the spray foam market in 2008 to expand its coating application services. The business received kudos from the Greene County School District for installing spray foam insulation for Newport Elementary School. When Baldwin & Shell completed building Golden Eagles High, they called back Milan Decorators for round two.

A Tricky Application

The architect's vision for the school made for an aesthetic building, but that didn't make foam application easy. The building's design included brick veneer and metal panel exterior facade. With about 240,000 square feet of exterior walls to spray, Fitzgerald's crew would have several months of work awaiting them.

The Milan Decorators crew began to spray the CMU (concrete masonry unit block) substrate with 2 inches of BASF's closed-cell SprayTight 180 2-pound foam.

"We check the substrate temperature, moisture content, ambient temperature, and humidity," says Fitzgerald. "Once it meets the manufacturer's recommended standards, we apply a flash coat – 1 thin pass of 1/2-inch foam or less."

The flash coat tests the adhesion of the foam to the substrate. Once the flash coat sets, the crew applied a minimum 2-inch thickness to a maximum of 2.5 inches. The metal wall panels were the most difficult part of the project to complete.

"On the metal walls panels, there is nothing to help you gauge the thickness of the foam," explains Fitzgerald. "We had to go back and monitor the thickness."

The process of spraying the areas where the brick would be applied went smoother because the brick ties – which were 3 inches in length - were a good measurement of the foam's



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thickness.

"The brick hooks were attached to the ties, which is what holds the brick wall in place," explains Fitzgerald. "We could pop the foam right off the ties."

The foam on the exterior walls did not require a coating. "It meets the NFPA 285 test for exterior cavity walls, so a thermal barrier coating was not required," explains Fitzgerald. "Nothing is being left exposed."

The Arkansas winds died down at night, and that was best time for the crew to complete the exterior application. But the crew did some spraying on the inside of the school, too.

"The biggest part of the project was spraying the exterior walls, but we also sprayed the inside of the gym," says Fitzgerald.



The crew sprayed between the 6-inch metal stud wall cavity of the 35-foot high gym. "We applied 2 inches for R-13," says Fitzgerald. "The gym is going to have sheetrock, and the auditorium and practice gym will have exposed block for the interior walls. In the auditorium we sprayed the block wall from the outside and from the inside they polished the CMU to make it look like it's prefinished stone."

When asked why he's in the spray foam business, Fitzgerald replied. "The finished product provides a perfect system for the exterior of buildings. I believe in it because it helps our environment, people save money on utility bills, buildings can be climate-controlled, and the air inside facilities is improved."

After 50 years of painting schools, factories, jails, and other commercial structures, Milan Decorators is proud of the spray foam application work it has done for Golden Eagles High as well as other commercial structures.

"When I used it for my own house and it worked, that's when I learned about it," says Fitzgerald. "It's a better system."

Students at Golden Eagles High may never know that they've got the "better system," but that's alright - Milan Decorators knows it, and their clients do too!

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