



CALKING AND SEALANT

Should the drawings and the specification distinguish calking and sealant?

By way of definition, there is pretty common agreement that 'calking' refers to the various non-rubbery gunks that fill cracks. Though oil-base calking is often used to seal window frames and CMU-to-siding joints in cheap housing construction, it is generally agreed that 'calking' should be limited to interior use. The term 'sealant' describes the more rubbery acrylics (like Tremco's Mono), polysulfides (Thiokol in all its packagings) and silicones (Dow, GE). Most of the butyls fall somewhere between, since they do not harden to either a putty-like or rubber-like consistency.

The Uniform System lists calking and sealants under one category, described only as 'fibrous and resilient packing, oil-base and elastic-base calking compounds, narrow-joint sealants, gaskets, & tapes.' This is a bit too vague, since the physical properties and the price -- from oil-base calking to a good silicone sealant -- may vary several hundred percent (\$6 to \$30 a gallon)

Should the drawings always say 'calking'; always say 'sealant'; or say 'calking' or 'sealant' according to the condition? The first is time honored, although many a draftsman, having kept up with building technology, feels properly uncomfortable arrowing 'calk' to a major building expansion joint. The second may cause expensive sealants to be indicated for unimportant joints of little movement potential. The third may cause vacillation and discoordination among the various individuals working on the same project.

A sane solution has been adopted by one large Baltimore firm which has strong technical quality control. Everything is noted 'sealant', but the specifications clearly distinguish the various types of joints and how each is to be handled -- using true sealants in many cases, but also specifying true calks where minimal performance is needed.

One specification consultant, working with drawings from many sources, that may say 'calking', 'sealant', or both indiscriminately, defines the terms as equivalent (neat trick!) and proceeds then to schedule the several types of joints and how each is to be filled -- using a palette of products ranging from oleoresinous calk to silicone sealant.

Some firms have their staffs accustomed to limiting 'calking' to interior work, while 'sealing' covers exterior work. Usually two sealants are specified, one for horizontal and one for vertical use.

The drift is definitely to more use of the term 'sealant', backed up by knowledgeable specifying of scope, product and technique -- backed up in turn by the excellent industry advice that is available at the twirl of a phone dial.

The four identical or related products traditionally specified outside of 0790 CALKING & SEALANTS are:

Roofing cement (as flashings)	0760 SHEET METAL
Glazing compounds	0885 GLASS & GLAZING
Curtainwall sealants	0890 CURTAINWALL SYSTEM
Acoustical sealer (at partitions)	0910 LATH & PLASTER and 0925 DRYWALL

Backup products and structural gasketing are properly specified with sealants in Section 0790.