

Perry Lieber Outlines Energy Efficiency Strategies Used in Coastal California Residential Construction

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Perry Lieber, a construction contracting consultant and construction manager based in Santa Barbara, California, has outlined the energy efficiency strategies commonly applied in residential construction along the California coast, where climate conditions, seismic codes, and marine exposure create a distinct set of building challenges.

Lieber, whose work is documented at perryliebersanta-barbara.com and perryliebersb.com, noted that coastal construction requires a more layered approach to energy performance than inland residential projects, largely because the marine environment accelerates material degradation and creates moisture management problems that directly affect a building's thermal performance over time.

Salt air is among the first factors Lieber cited. Corrosion from salt-laden ocean air affects metal fasteners, window frames, and HVAC components, which can compromise the integrity of energy systems faster than in non-coastal environments. Lieber said contractors working in these zones routinely specify marine-grade hardware, stainless steel fasteners, and aluminum or fiberglass window frames rather than standard vinyl or steel, which degrade more quickly under salt exposure.

On insulation, Lieber explained that coastal humidity complicates standard insulation choices. Closed-cell spray foam is frequently used in wall cavities in these projects because it resists moisture intrusion while providing a higher R-value per inch compared to fiberglass batts. Proper vapor barriers and building wraps are also standard in coastal builds to prevent interstitial condensation, which undermines insulation effectiveness over time.

"Windows are a major energy factor on the coast," Lieber said. "You're dealing with wind-driven rain, salt exposure, and significant temperature differentials in some areas. Double or triple-pane windows with low-emissivity coatings are now pretty standard in these projects because they manage heat transfer and handle the pressure cycles coastal weather puts on glazing."

HVAC selection in coastal California construction, Lieber noted, involves additional considerations beyond standard sizing calculations. Variable-speed heat pump systems have become more common in recent years, partly because they perform efficiently across the mild

but occasionally wide temperature range of the California coast and partly because they avoid the corrosion issues associated with traditional split systems when outdoor condenser units are exposed to salt air. Protective coated coils are a common specification in these installations.

Seismic requirements also intersect with energy efficiency in California residential construction. The structural reinforcements required under state and local seismic codes add mass and complexity to wall assemblies, which contractors account for when planning insulation installation and air sealing details. Lieber noted that air sealing at top plates and penetrations requires close coordination between framing and insulation crews in seismically reinforced walls.

Solar integration, Lieber said, is now a baseline expectation in most new coastal California residential projects, following California's building code mandate for solar on new single-family homes. Roof orientation, shading from neighboring structures, and salt air effects on panel longevity are all variables contractors evaluate during the pre-construction planning phase.

ABOUT PERRY LIEBER:

Perry Lieber is a construction contracting consultant and construction manager based in Santa Barbara, California. He works on residential construction projects across the coastal California region.

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