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TEXAS
TRAILBLAZER

FEDERAL SUPPORT OF PROJECT LABOR AGREEMENTS UNDER FIRE

Members of two Washington, D.C.-based contractor groups have challenged government endorsement and promotion of project labor agreements on building and transportation work.

ASSOCIATED BUILDERS AND CONTRACTORS

As of late September, 402 ABC member companies, plus 504 of their employees, submitted comments to the White House opposing implementation of President Obama's Executive Order 13502, encouraging agencies to consider union-only project labor agreements (PLAs) on federal construction contracts exceeding \$25 million. In comments filed with the Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council, ABC members argued that their companies would be discouraged from bidding on projects because PLAs discriminate against their employees. Under PLAs, employees said that they would a) be forced to pay union dues; b) not benefit from employer contributions into union pension plans unless they were to join a union; and, c) may be denied employment under union hall hiring requirements.

"Government-mandated PLAs hurt competition on construction contracts from nonunion contractors and their employees, which comprise 84 percent of the U.S. construction workforce," said 2009 ABC National Chairman Jerry Gorski (Gorski Engineering, Inc., Collegeville, Pa.). "When the federal government sets aside work for a favored few, hardworking taxpayers pay the price. PLAs increase the cost of construction by mandating inefficient and archaic union work rules and limit the pool of potential quality bidders, all without any increased economy or efficiency to federal procurement."

"Project Labor Agreements on Federal Construction Projects: A Costly Solution in Search of a Problem," a Beacon Hill Institute/Suffolk University study released Sept. 23, confirms that PLAs significantly increase federal project construction costs. Its review of federal construction projects from 2001-2008, during which government-mandated PLAs were prohibited, reveals no instances of labor disruption that resulted in significant project delays or increased costs. The study is downloadable at www.beaconhill.org/BHISTudies/PLA2009/PLAFinal090923.pdf.

ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS OF AMERICA

AGC is asking the U.S. Department of Labor to justify its PLA requirement for a \$10 million Job Corps Center in Manchester, N.H., contending the decision effectively shuts out a majority of local contractors. AGC represents nonunion and union contractors, the latter accounting for 10.9 percent of New Hampshire's construction workforce. "How

does severely restricting competition for federal work benefit taxpayers, help construction workers or support economic recovery?" asks AGC CEO Stephen Sandherr.

The Labor Department's move follows an executive order proposing that agency officials consider mandating PLAs on all federal construction contracts exceeding \$25 million. The agreements typically set above-market

wage rates for site workers, including drivers delivering supplies, and force contractors to hire through union halls. Even union contractors may find the government's terms for the Manchester Job Corps Center too prohibitive, Sandherr observes, adding that GAO has found little evidence of PLAs delivering cost savings, easing work-place tensions, or protecting against construction delays.

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Underground integrity

CHEMICAL TREATMENT HELPS DELIVER DURABLE, SUSTAINABLE SEPTIC TANKS

Among items best buried—the longer the better—septic tanks top the list. Accordingly, Nanaimo, B.C.-based ABC Precast & Ready Mix has applied advanced chemistry to ensure that their concrete tanks remain the product of choice for residents of British Columbia.

“The biggest problem with septic tanks,” explains ABC Precast & Ready Mix General Manager A. J. Hustins, “is leaching causing degradation to concrete. To minimize this effect, we take special care to form our septic tanks with newer molds and high-quality concrete, exceeding industry standards for thickness and strength. We also look to industry advancements.”

That search did not take the company far afield, as the operation had been testing in other product lines **an additive that provides waterproofing protection and concrete strength enhancement—Xypex Admix C500.** “The product was performing so well in terms of waterproofing and durability,” Hustins reports, “that we decided to put it to the test in our septic tanks, with some impressive results.”

IN-HOUSE TESTING

Added during batching, Xypex C500 reacts with calcium hydroxide and other cement hydration by-products in the mix, causing a catalytic reaction that generates a nonsoluble crystalline formation throughout the concrete’s pores and capillary tracts. Thus, the admixture-fortified concrete is permanently sealed against penetration by water or liquids from any direction, as well as protected from deterioration due to harsh environmental conditions.

ABC Precast & Ready Mix examined the impact of Xypex Admix under a variety of conditions, including sulfate resistance and compressive strength testing. Acid-resistance tests have shown that the additive’s blocking of acid penetration prevents formation of sulfoaluminate hydrate, an expansive compound that causes the concrete to self-destruct. Also highly resistant to chemicals, **Xypex C-500** seals hairline cracks up to 0.4 mm. And, unlike coatings applied to the concrete surface, it requires no reapplication.

Typically, the producer aims to achieve a minimum 32 MPa in its tank mix design at a 28-day break. **The average obtained with Xypex is 45 MPa.** “The Xypex crystalline reaction helps the concrete hold more moisture over a longer period of time,” Hustins notes, “so we get a longer slower, moister cure, which ultimately yields a higher strength.”

Some benefits were visible to the naked eye.

“We knew our tanks were working in terms of waterproofing,” Hustins affirms. “Looking at a tank filled with water to see if the concrete was getting darker in color and showing signs of dampness, we saw none of the color changes that would have been a clear sign that water was leaching through the concrete.”

FIELD PROOF

All ABC Precast septic tank mixes are dosed with Xypex Admix C500, which is available in volumes of 275, 400, 750, 1,000, 1,200, 2,000, and 4,000 imperial gallons. The product is added at a dosage rate of 3 percent by weight of portland cement for precast tanks.

Among septic tank installers and contractors in British Columbia, **recognition of the premium quality afforded by Xypex Admix C500 is growing.** Recently, ABC Precast was awarded a contract to supply a multiple-tank system for one of the Gulf Islands, located off Vancouver’s east coast. “The client specifically selected our septic tanks for their strength and durability,” Hustins emphasizes. —www.xypex.com

