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Why we fight for concrete



Allen Hamblen is chairman of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association and president and CEO of the CalPortland Company. **Courtesy photo**

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During Washington's 2016 legislative session, the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association spearheaded an effort to put a stop to legislation that would have granted tax breaks for the use of a product known as cross-laminated timber (CLT).

It may seem to be an odd choice for the concrete community to push back on a wood product right here in timber's backyard, but that is exactly how important



we believe it is to promote safe growth for American towns and cities. Simply put, just because wood is abundant does not mean its use should be incentivized for construction projects like schools and multifamily housing.

We took a stand because the unintended consequences of the proposed legislation were far too egregious to be left unsaid.

First and foremost, NRMCA and our allies were quick to highlight the fact that CLT is an inferior product to concrete construction in terms of safety, sustainability and durability. Wood rots, molds and, worst of all, it burns. And while it certainly has many construction uses, establishing it as the de facto building material for projects that may serve at-risk populations is risky and shortsighted.

Beyond the bill's very obvious safety and public health concerns, it just wasn't feasible because it threatened to disrupt the marketplace and throw a wrench into the state budget.

It is concerning that this bill, and legislation like it, make it so designers, architects and builders will instead be far too concerned with price differential than safety. Different buildings have different design needs that require the use of different products, but they all should meet certain safety standards that CLT cannot.

Even in a state with a venerable timber industry, the government should not be in the business of picking winner and losers, especially when lives are on the line. Growth comes when people invest, design and build new structures here in Washington that spur the economy, create jobs and provide housing options.

At CalPortland, more than 300 of our nearly 600 statewide employees work at our Tacoma and Enumclaw facilities. Smart growth comes when the investors, architects, designers and builders aren't constrained by financial concerns that pit one building material against another and are instead free to use whatever material they believe is right for the job.



We are confident that when given the choice in an open and free market, concrete is the right choice for safe growth.

Long story short, we fight for concrete because we know that the construction industry, even right here on timber's home turf, is not united behind the idea of tax credits that bank economic growth on a single product, especially one as risky as CLT.

Allen Hamblen is chairman of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association and the president and CEO of the CalPortland Company, the largest ready mixed concrete producer in the state of Washington.