

# Midwest to certify roofers who have learned not to burn

Imagine putting equipment that could destroy an entire building in the hands of a minimally trained worker. This is how the Midwest Roofing Contractors Association (MRCA) views many torched-on modified bitumen applications. The Association believes that the hands-on training applicators generally receive in torch applications is not enough to teach them how to safely handle an open-flame torch on a rooftop.

MRCA's Certified Roofing Torch Welding Applicator (CERTA) program provides the formal, specialized training the Association believes is needed for the safe installation of torch-applied modified bitumen. The curriculum was developed with the assistance of the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association (ARMA) and the United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers. "There is no comparable training program in the roofing industry . . .," MRCA says. "Roofers will be taught the essentials for the protection of persons, materials and property."

As MRCA has envisioned the program, it will be specifically for the roof mechanic, the person actually handling the equipment. The program's training sessions will be scheduled in enough sites around the Midwest to make them accessible to a large number of roofers.

At the end of the one-day training sessions, participating roofers will be certified and will be issued cards indicating their successful completion of the course. The certification belongs to the roofer and not to his or her employer. Periodic recertification will be required. To be recertified, workers will have to meet certain conditions and go through additional training and testing.

## Addressing everyone's concerns

Topics covered during the training sessions range from safe application practices to the proper handling of propane gas tanks and equipment. The program has been designed to address the concerns of roofing contractors, fire and code authorities, modified bitumen roofing material manufac-



turers, equipment manufacturers, fuel suppliers and insurers, MRCA says.

One cornerstone of the program is a videotape produced by Owens-Corning, ARMA and the Union titled *A Guide to Safety: Torch-On Modified Bitumens*. The tape, which has been endorsed by NRCA, provides step-by-step illustrations of proper installation and safety procedures. (This video is available from NRCA for \$25.)

Another important part of MRCA's program is the Midwest Association's document *Safety in Torch-Welded Roofing*. The booklet is written as a standard. "The standard comprising the certification program can become the criteria for individual companies and could be accepted as a national standard," MRCA says. The guidelines in the document cover proper training steps as well as correct application techniques.

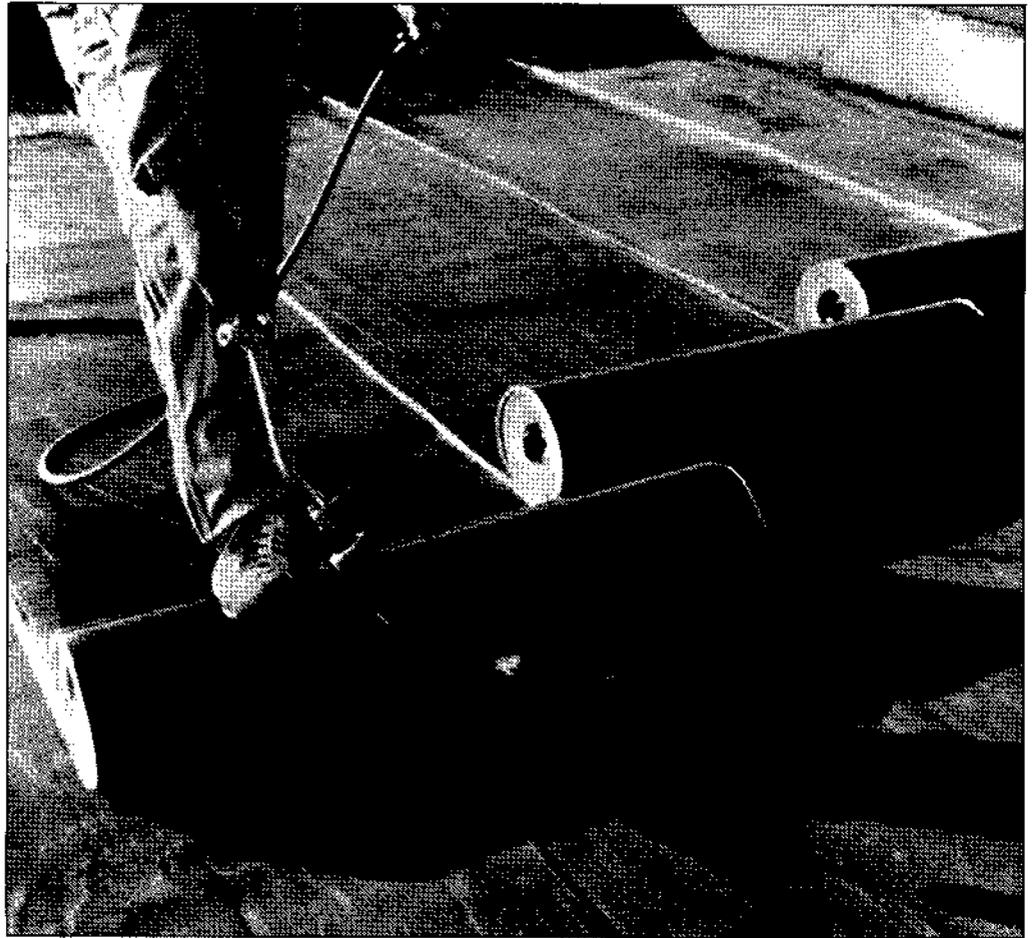
These guidelines are to be studied in a classroom setting during the training sessions. As the students follow the document's format, they will be led through the safe installation of a torch-welded modified bitumen system from the set up of equipment to the fire watch at the end of the day.

*Safety in Torch-Welded Roofing* begins with a glossary of the torching and modified bitumen terms used throughout the document. It then outlines the responsibilities roofers and their supervisors and managers bear for a safe operation.

Management is responsible for making sure the supervisors and applicators are properly trained in the cautious operation of equipment, construction safety and emergency procedures, according to the document. Management must also establish safe working procedures and use supervisors who are familiar with the hazards of this type of work. It is also management's responsibility to supply workers with the right equipment.

Supervisors must see to it that the worksite is free of hazards and that safe procedures are used. It is the supervisor's duty to survey the rooftop for combustible materials and determine what steps must be taken to keep these materials from the torch's open flame.

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Under MRCA's guidelines, the roofers themselves are responsible for understanding and following safe torch handling procedures. The roofers must avoid the use of defective equipment and must not proceed in areas where unsafe conditions exist. "Roofers shall be responsible for their actions when working with or around torch-welded modified bitumen products and equipment," the document says.

Other sections of *Safety in Torch-Welded Roofing* detail the steps management, supervisors and workers must take to carry out their responsibilities. Included are chapters describing:

- the protection of the general area and the surfaces being torch welded;
- application techniques and concerns;
- fire prevention and protection;
- the effect of windy conditions on a torch welding operation;
- the safe way to conduct training demonstrations;
- precautionary labeling;
- torch welding equipment, including set up, operation and maintenance;

- the specific requirements of hand and machine torching;
- laps and flashings; and
- torch welding safety.

Appendices to the document include fact sheets on fire prevention, burn protection, material and hose hazards, combustion, and health and safety.

MRCA is in the process of organizing its first training sessions. According to MRCA President George Moeller, the initial meeting will include a three-day training session for the instructors as well as a one-day session for 60 to 80 journeymen roofers in the Kansas City area. The instructors that will be chosen from around the Midwest will have already had experience in apprentice training programs, Moeller said. Groups affiliated with MRCA are also welcome to send instructors for training.

For more information about the program, or to set up a training session for instructors or workers, interested parties should contact Barbara Myers at MRCA headquarters, 1440 Commerce Bank Building, 1000 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo. 64106; 816/421-MRCA.