

The Strategic Development Council— *A Best-Kept Secret*

Collaborating to accelerate technology acceptance

To remain competitive, an industry must continually improve its work product to meet the ever-increasing expectations of its clients. A central question is how will an industry encourage, nurture, and quickly implement innovations to benefit society, the industry, and its customers?

The concrete industry is not exempt from the demand to provide a better product, more quickly and more cost-effectively. Because tried-and-true methods of design and construction offer relatively safe and defensible practices, reduce the need for education of its workforce and customers, and limit the risks associated with innovation, the introduction and acceptance of new technology in the concrete industry can often be noticeably (some would say maddeningly) slow.

The mantra of the Strategic Development Council (SDC) has become “accelerating technology acceptance.”

WHAT IS THE SDC?

Founded in 1997, the Strategic Development Council comprises organizations from the concrete industry represented by their top level executives who have a common goal that is best described by SDC’s Vision Statement:

“Bring together the concrete industry, along with government, academia and

customers, to focus on collaborative problem-solving in meaningful technology advancement. The result shall be the expeditious movement of meaningful innovations through the standardization process into commercial use.”

The SDC was originally organized to facilitate consortia that could unite developers, producers, and customers around market-driven technology needs and produce results that advance the state of concrete construction technology.

More recently, the SDC has begun to focus its attention on “industry critical technologies” in the concrete industry, to identify barriers to the acceptance of those technologies, and to concentrate resources to remove barriers—in short, to do what is necessary to accelerate technology acceptance.

THE ROLE OF THE SDC

The role of the SDC in the concrete industry is to facilitate advancement of concrete technology and can best be described by examples of its past and current activities. SDC’s activities can be grouped into three distinct areas outlined in the SDC mission statement:

The SDC shall facilitate advancement of concrete technology by:

- Providing a forum for visioning and prioritization of key challenges facing the concrete industry;
- Assisting ACI in timely adoption of innovative technologies, problem solutions, and best practices; and
- Providing a framework for consortia-directed development programs leading to or supporting improved commercialization.

In 2000, the SDC facilitated development of *Vision 2030: A Vision for the U.S. Concrete Industry* from which the SDC subsequently provided recommendations to ACI for accelerating technology acceptance and convened a workshop to examine the need for "recruitment of human resources" into the concrete industry. More recently the SDC facilitated *Vision 2020: Concrete Repair Industry's Vision of the Future*. To be published in early 2006, this will be a vision and roadmap for the concrete repair industry. The SDC will be assembling a "Council of Repair" to ensure that visions become strategies, strategies become action plans, and that action occurs.

In 2003, an Inter-Industry Working Group on Floor Issues identified an industry critical technology/issue—floor moisture—that was conservatively estimated as a \$1 million to \$2 million/week problem. The SDC mobilized to address this issue and recently delivered a document titled "Concrete Slabs to Receive Moisture-Sensitive Floor Coverings" to ACI Committee 302, Construction of Concrete Floors. A project to create a document addressing floor moisture was originally proposed to ACI Committee 302 by the SDC in November 2004. The SDC retained an expert in the field who developed the first draft of the document, reducing the development time by an estimated 2 to 3 years. The document is now the property of ACI Committee 302, has been balloted, and is working its way through the ACI consensus process. Assuming publication occurs in late 2006 as originally

targeted, SDC will meet its original goal of document development in a 2-year time frame of start to publication.

ATA

The hallmark of an accepted technology is its inclusion in standards such as building codes, specifications, and state-of-the-art reports. With the faster pace of innovation, it is increasingly important that a standards developing organizations' (SDOs) process for acknowledging and accepting worthwhile improvements also be more timely and nimble.

In 2004, the SDC created a report titled "Accelerating Technology Acceptance" (ATA). (For a copy of that report, visit www.concretesdc.org.) The ATA report identified 59 items for ACI and other SDOs to consider/implement in an effort to make SDOs and their consensus processes easier to navigate.

In April 2005, the ACI Board of Direction responded to the ATA recommendations. By this time, some of the recommendations were already being implemented by ACI and its Technical Activities Committee (TAC). Several others were noted as worthwhile goals, but not necessarily within the purview of ACI. However, the Board did endorse a significant number of recommendations as part of the role of the SDC. This has resulted in the SDC pursuing "short-term" (59 recommendations) and "long-term" (refining the role of SDC) aspects of ATA.

Regarding the short-term impact of ATA, Claude Bedard (Euclid Chemical Co.) chaired a task group including Peter Emmons (Structural Preservation Systems), Steve Kosmatka (PCA), Lawrence Roberts (WR Grace), and Brad Violetta (Degussa) that has worked through the 59 recommendations and responses to assure follow through by ACI and to prioritize SDC's activities. This group is also SDC's liaison with ACI's Technical Activities Committee to assure continued communication and coordination with TAC.

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More importantly, this exercise has provided the basis for SDC's "long-term" approach to 1) identify industry critical technologies; 2) identify barriers to their acceptance; and 3) develop strategies and focus resources to assure those barriers are overcome.

The SDC is not "reinventing the wheel" by developing a new consensus process. Rather, its goal is to use existing processes and tools currently available in a strategic and focused approach, somewhat akin to applying oil to a squeaky wheel. In this case, the squeaky wheels are technical issues identified by business interests as the most important items at this time. It is the members of SDC who identify what is most critical to them and, by representation, the concrete industry.

THE ADVANTAGE OF SDC

The advantage of SDC is "leadership," defined as "enabling, facilitating, and expediting." SDC can focus on areas within the concrete industry that are:

- Acknowledged to be issues; and
- Extend beyond a single or few interests in the concrete industry.

The SDC is currently engaged in a number of initiatives/projects dealing with accelerating technology acceptance (ATA): identifying critical industry technologies that impact the concrete industry, identifying barriers to technology acceptance and implementation, and acting as a catalyst to remove barriers.

For smaller companies seeking acceptance of their technologies, participation in SDC can provide the insight into and direction within SDO processes. Such "pathfinding" is a natural benefit of participation in SDC and can be worth the time and expense of membership for smaller, innovating companies.

INTERESTED IN THE SDC?

The SDC is emerging as the leadership and voice for the concrete industry on issues involving the entire industry. It provides the objective voice that advocates improvements to industry efficiency and quality. For more information on the SDC and its current activities, visit the website at www.concretesdc.com or call Doug Sordyl, SDC Managing Director, at (248) 848-3755.

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