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Charles Goldsmith speaks at contractors' summit meeting about hurricane's effects.

Experts urge revisions in building code

By Jack Snyder

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

Damage from Hurricane Andrew might have been cut in half if building codes had been followed, workmanship was less sloppy and inspections were thorough, a roofing expert said at an industry meeting in Orlando Thursday.

"That's a lot of ifs, but the facts are that every bit of damage I inspected could be traced to a problem," said Charles B. Goldsmith, president of Goldsmith and Associates Inc., a Clearwater architecture and roofing consulting company.

Goldsmith visited Miami two days after the storm to check damage both as a roofing consultant and as chairman of the National Task Force of the Roofing Industry Committee on Wind Issues, a study group formed by roofing-related industries several years ago.

Wider use of hurricane shutters also could have greatly diminished storm damage, Goldsmith said in a talk before the Florida Roofing, Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors Association's annual meeting at the Orange

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Inspections are under fire

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County Convention/Civic Center.

"I saw houses that were trashed because windows were smashed out by flying missiles and yet the roof was intact," he said.

On Thursday, Dade County commissioners moved to fill a damaging gap in building inspections.

Starting today, inspectors will be required to check plywood sheathing—the bottom layer of a roof—before roofers are allowed to cover it with shingles or tiles.

Much of the hurricane's residential damage came when sections of the 4-by-6-foot sheathing flew away.

Goldsmith said his inspections of storm damage turned up sloppy roof work that should have been caught by building inspectors and work that did not meet existing building codes.

He said a national certification system needs to be developed for building inspectors. But, he said, many governments oppose that system because they fear labor costs will rise.

He also said the insurance industry needs to offer discounts for windproof commercial buildings and homes similar to those offered on fire hazards.

"An owner gets a premium [reduction] on a building built to the highest level of fire protection," Goldsmith said. "The same should be done for resistance to wind damage."

Goldsmith conceded that buildings also were damaged that were constructed exactly to code and in which workmanship was good. But, he said, the damage was less severe.

Bob Ferrante, Southeast regional technical services manager for Monier Tile Inc. in Boca Raton, said the roofing industry must address the problem of improper installation and poor work in the wake of the hurricane.

Ferrante noted that Dade County already has moved to strengthen its building code following the storm, including banning the use of staples in roof installation.

Goldsmith said the damage from Hurricane Andrew has one positive spinoff. Every industry with any connection to construction has been in South Florida studying the damage. "We have developed more information from this storm than any hurricane in history," he said.