FACTS | Foam Plastic Applications for Better Building

Content originally produced for continuousinsulation.org with support from ACC's Foam Sheathing Committee.

Moisture Control for Wall Assemblies:

Building Robust Walls with Foam Plastic Insulating Sheathing (FPIS) Continuous Insulation (ci)

RULE #1: Keep Water Vapor (Humid Air) Away from Cool Surfaces!

When installed in accordance with modern building code and energy code requirements for continuous insulation and water vapor control (see CI's Quick Guide: Water Vapor Control and wall calculators), FPIS ci keeps water-sensitive materials inside the wall dry by maintaining a temperature above the dew point. Simply use the right R-value of FPIS ci for the wall assembly based on the climate zone and an appropriately specified interior vapor retarder (or no interior vapor retarder) to control outward vapor diffusion in the winter and maintain inward vapor diffusion (drying) in the warmer seasons. This approach results in much dryer walls with a more stable moisture content throughout all seasons of the year in comparison to walls that rely exclusively on the traditional use of interior vapor retarders without any temperature control provided by FPIS ci, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Learn more about the use of FPIS for water vapor control here.

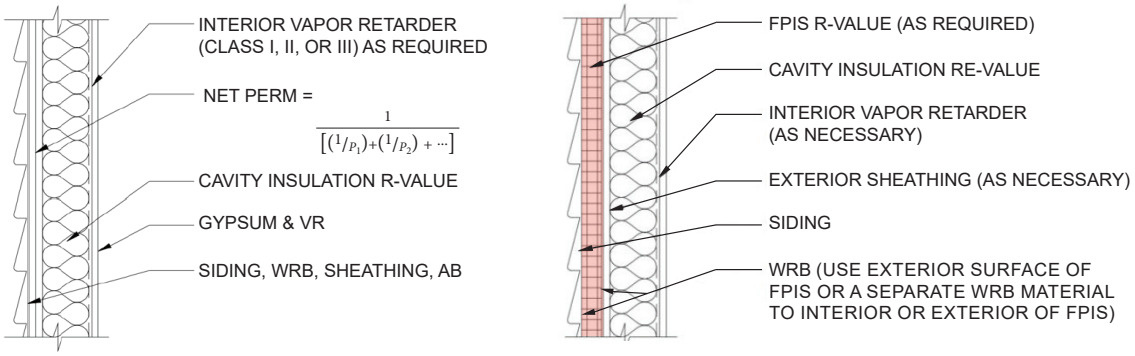
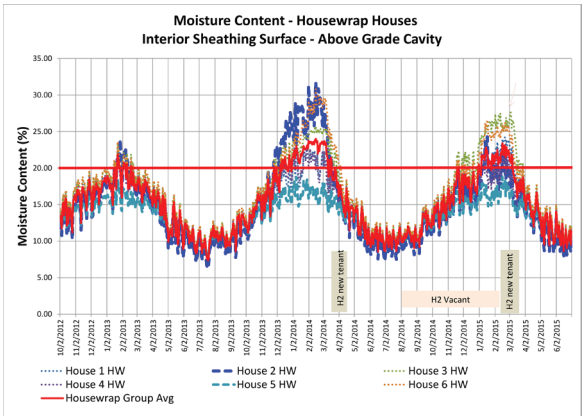
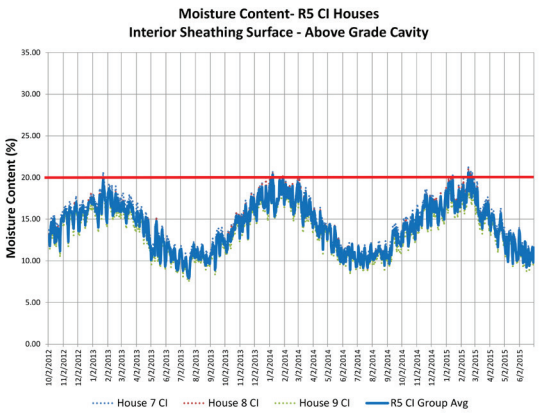


Figure 1. Cavity insulation only vs. wall with FPIS ci insulation (see Figure 2 for performance comparison)



(A) Walls with R20 cavity insulation only consistently experiencing wet OSB.



(B) Walls with R5 FPIS ci keeping OSB sheathing dry

Figure 2. Comparison of 12 actual walls with and without R5 FPIS ci

(Source: ABTG Educational Program)

For more information, visit continuousinsulation.org

RULE #2: Minimize Air Leakage!

Leakage of moist air from the indoors or outdoors into or through a building assembly can easily override the function of vapor retarders. Minimize air leakage by following energy code requirements for use of continuous air barriers and sealing of joints and gaps. It's not just an energy code concern (although it does save a lot of energy).

When RULE #1 is followed and the FPIS ci is installed per Figure 3 as a code compliant air barrier, walls are less vulnerable to the consequence of air leakage for two reasons: (1) the FPIS ci will help limit air infiltration from the exterior (especially if it is also used as the WRB system, see RULE #3), and (2) it will also reduce the potential for moist air to condensate on or be adsorbed by moisture-sensitive materials inside the wall because it controls the temperature of those materials. Find more information on use of FPIS as an air barrier here.

RULE #3: Avoid Rain Water Intrusion!

Most importantly, keep rain water out of walls by proper use of cladding, drainage, water-resistive barrier (WRB), and flashing as required by the building code and good practice. Many FPIS ci products can be used as a code-approved WRB system when installed in accordance with the manufacturer's installation instructions. Approved FPIS WRB systems use durable joint treatments (e.g., joint tapes) and flashing materials (e.g., adhered or fluid-applied flexible flashings) as shown in Figure 4. FPIS WRB systems are subject to some of the most stringent wall assembly water-resistance test requirements. Find more information on FPIS WRB systems here.

See also: General Installation Guidance
General Window Installation & Flashing Instruction

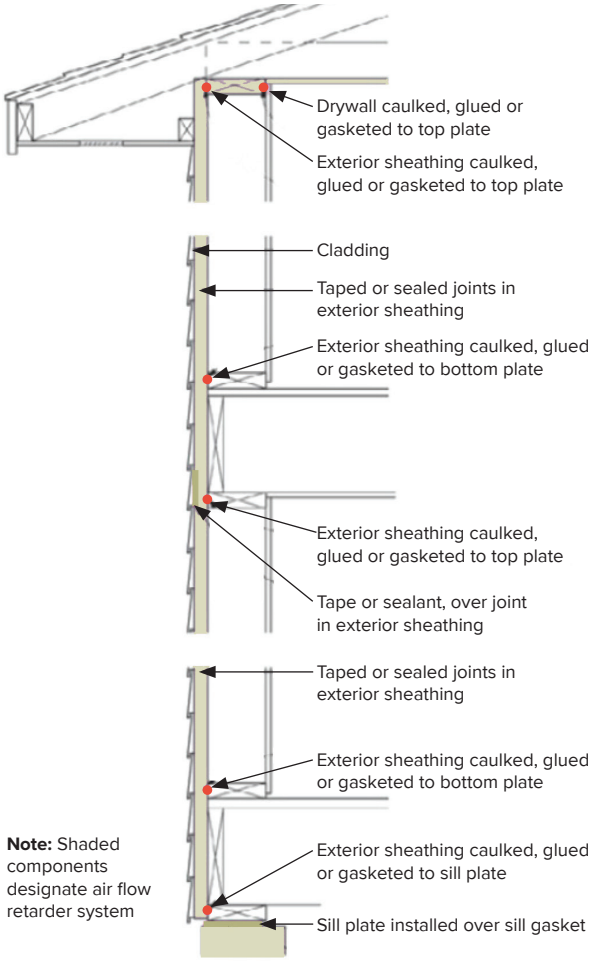


Figure 3. FPIS ci installed as an air barrier exterior sheathing.

(Source: BECP Building Energy Code Resource Guide Air Leakage Guide)

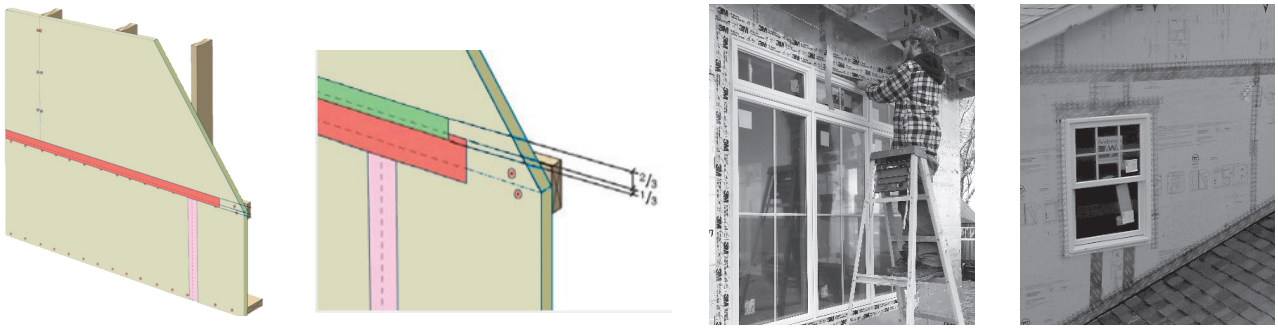


Figure 4. FPIS WRB System installation using joint tapes and adhered flashings; refer to manufacturer installation instructions for specific details.

BOTTOM LINE: Use FPIS ci as continuous insulation, vapor control, air barrier, and water-resistive barrier to create an efficient, robust, and moisture-resistant wall assembly for optimal performance and code compliance.