

ON THE JOB with Plasterers Local 82



“If I don’t do my job right, it could cost people their lives,” says Ryan Weed. “That’s the bottom line.”

Weed, 40, is a fireproofing specialist, a member of Plasterers Local 82, and a Tier 2 foreman for Norkote, a company based in Everett, Washington, that specializes in fireproofing coatings and spray-on acoustical and thermal insulation.

“In a fire, they turn off the elevators,” Weed said. “When you’re 50 floors up, you need time to get down those stairs. If I don’t do my job right, a floor could collapse and take a bunch of people out because they didn’t have time to get out of the building.”

For Weed, doing the job right

requires a deep understanding of materials and the right way to apply them. In a high-rise building, steel beams and columns don’t burn, of course, but they *can* heat up, lose their rigidity, and become unable to support their load. That’s why building codes require that fireproofing insulation be applied to the structural steel components of steel-frame structures. Weed’s crew sprays on products like Cafco Blaze-Shield HP, a powder of mineral wool with cement and aluminum sulfate to speed the setting time. Properly applied to decking, steel beams, and columns, it can provide up to four hours of fire resistance.

When the work is done, an in-

spector comes out to take samples and test for density, thickness, cohesion and adhesion.

You might think plasterers would mostly be working in plaster, but today, fireproofing makes up half of Plasterers Local 82’s work.

Weed got his start on the nonunion side of the industry in 1997, but says he got smart in 2000 and joined the union.

“If you pay a guy more money and take better care of him, you’re going to get better people. The quality of guys you’re going to have in a union – nine times out of ten – they’re going to be better”

—Don McIntosh

At Portland’s Providence Park soccer stadium, Norkote foreman Ryan Weed (above) runs a fireproofing crew. Stacked up behind him is the product that will prevent the structural steel from weakening in the event of fire: Cafco Blaze-Shield HP, made by Isolotek. Made of rockwool and cement, Blaze is very itchy, so for protection, crew member Epi Serrano (left) wears a properly fitted N95 particulate mask and a Tyvek suit. The two Plasterers union members are assisted by hod carrier Mark Smith of Laborers Local 737, who operates the remote-controlled mixing machine (above to the left of Weed). The machine uses two augers to force the product through the hose. Applied directly to decking, steel beams, columns, it’s rated to shield them from fire for up to four hours.



What do plasterers do?

Less expensive drywall replaced labor-intensive lath and plaster more than a generation ago, but roughly 100 members of Portland-based Plasterers Local 82 continue to make a living in fireproofing and in high-end corners of the construction industry. In Oregon wine country, they’re in high demand for old-world-style buildings like *Domaine Serene* in Dayton, above, where they applied plaster veneers, installed ornamental features like cornices, and even put up stucco for the exterior walls. You’ll also find members of Local 82 in some of Portland’s older neighborhoods, doing restoration work in homes where owners value quality (and can afford to pay for it). Plasterers are also needed when a building’s architecture calls for unusual shapes, or needs special interior surfaces like acoustic plasters. The Allison Inn and Spa is a good example of both. The \$45 million LEED Gold-certified luxury resort in Newberg features an industry-award-winning spiral staircase (below) with angled surfaces that required the skilled hands of Lake Oswego-based Harver Company to construct. And when you’re paying \$435 a night to stay there, you expect some peace and quiet; Harver employees also did the spa interiors, which meant applying \$300-a-bucket sound-absorbing plaster over panels made of wool and recycled glass.

It’s a good living. Under Local 82’s contract, a journeyman plasterer makes a minimum of \$35.79 an hour plus \$16.58 an hour in health, pension, and training benefits. (Fireproofing, which can be extra difficult and dirty work, pays a \$2 an hour premium.)

