

# It's Mandatory

## Innovative Coding Process Helps Company Meet Customer Requests



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That was the situation faced by SelectCrete Inc., a Bakersfield, Calif.-based manufacturer of cement backerboard, which is used as a water-resistant subsurface for tiling in commercial and residential building applications. In 2006, SelectCrete received a mandate from its primary customer, a Japanese firm, to place variable-data codes on the back of cement backerboard pieces.

One option was to employ a process of rubber-stamping backerboard pieces after they had cured, but that would have been far too time-consuming. Instead, the company instituted a process to apply codes during production, using a Videojet® 1120 small-character continuous inkjet printer from Videojet Technologies Inc. to print codes on a laminated ribbon.

The solution has allowed SelectCrete line operators to maintain steady manufacturing speeds. In addition, the low-maintenance printer allows line operators to avoid costly downtime and focus efforts on producing quality backerboard.

### Coding During Production

SelectCrete manufactures cement backerboard on a 60-foot long line, using reusable fiberglass carrier sheets. The development process begins by placing cement mix, aggregate and water on top of a fiberglass sheet. The layers are then dispensed with the proper density and thickness. A final sheet

of fiberglass is placed on top of the layers to guide the cutter at the end of the line. SelectCrete produces backerboard in sizes ranging from 3 by 5 feet to 4 by 8 feet.

The coding process takes place at the start of the production line. An 8,000-foot laminated white ribbon label is printed with black ink via the stationary ink jet printer, and then placed on the fiberglass sheet face down, with a cement layer placed on top of it. After product has been removed from the line and has cured, pieces are flipped over and the laminated ribbon, now flush to the product, is face up so the code information is easy to view during shipping and distribution.

“Without the printer, my production crew would have had to stop stacking the cured product to roll a code on each panel,” says Phil Miller, who co-owns the company with his father, Bob. “We hand-sort, so we can't afford to slow the production process down.”

Coding is important to SelectCrete's customer. If there are any questions or problems with a board, the Millers can check the manufacturing date specified in the code, a key quality-control measure.

In one way, the success of SelectCrete's ink jet printing solution has created a new challenge. Its Japanese customer recently made an additional request: coding Japanese characters on the ribbon. But that's not a problem, because the Videojet 1120 can print characters for 23 foreign languages, including Japanese.

“We have responded to this request seamlessly,” Bob Miller says. “We would not have been able to do so if we were using rubber stamps.” 