“Or equal” may not even be comparable

Chances are you have certain brands you reach for regularly, be it coffee, cereal, yogurt or beer. For other items, you may be willing to forgo a particular brand for cost savings or to simply give another brand a try, which brings us to the subject of specifying “or equal” products for your projects.

The reality in the building industry is rarely are two products, created by different manufacturers, using varied ingredients, truly equal. It is a nice concept, but just not very likely. If you have done your homework, there may be no acceptable alternatives to your choice. The chosen, branded product may have some properties that are critical to the project.

Yet when you are specifying a product, how can you ensure that you get what you want and need?

According to Amy Hockett, NGC architectural specialist, you might consider the semantics of the terms you choose. As she says, “I’d like to address the ways to avoid specification confusion around the term ‘or equal’ and suggest a shift in language to ‘or comparable product’ or perhaps ‘or approved alternative.’ These suggested alternate phrases allow the architect or engineer to evaluate the proposed product request beside the features of the specified product.”

Hockett also notes another option is to name the products of choice and then indicate “substitutions per instructions to bidders” (if allowing in the bidding phase) or add “substitutions per Division 1 General Requirements” (if allowed following the contract award).

As Pat Grotlisch, NGC construction design manager for the Western region, notes, because contractors are so busy and deadlines are critical, they will usually select the products that are named by the architect or specifier unless they have a personal preference or price incentive due to distribution relationships. However, if a different manufacturer is added to the specifications, it is important to update the plans with the correct UL design number for a particular assembly since it could be different.

And as Hockett adds, “With any alternate product considered, there needs to be coordination between all the applicable trades and other construction documents. This especially pertains to the drawings and details related to the proposed alternate product.”

Click on specs for information about selecting National Gypsum products. For help specifying, don’t hesitate to contact us. We’re here to help you build better every day.

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