

HARMATHY'S TEN RULES

Rule 1: The “thermal”¹ fire endurance of a construction consisting of a number of parallel layers is greater than the sum of the “thermal” fire endurences characteristic of the individual layers when exposed separately to fire.

The minimum performance of an untested assembly can be estimated if the fire endurance of the individual components is known. Though the exact rating of the assembly cannot be stated, the endurance of the assembly is greater than the sum of the endurance of the components.

When a building assembly or component is found to be deficient, the fire endurance can be upgraded by providing a protective membrane. This membrane could be a new layer of brick, plaster, or drywall. The fire endurance of this membrane is called the “finish rating.” Appendix Tables 1.5.1 and 1.5.2 contain the finish ratings for the most commonly employed materials. (See also the notes to Rule 2).

The test criteria for the finish rating is the same as for the thermal fire endurance of the total assembly: average temperature increases of 250°F (121°C) above ambient or 325°F (163°C) above ambient at any one place with the membrane being exposed to the fire. The temperature is measured at the interface of the assembly and the protective membrane.

Rule 2: The fire endurance of a construction does not decrease with the addition of further layers.

Harmathy notes that this rule is a consequence of the previous rule. Its validity follows from the fact that the additional layers increase both the resistance to heat flow and the heat capacity of the construction. This, in turn, reduces the rate of temperature rise at the unexposed surface.

This rule is not just restricted to “thermal” performance but affects the other fire test criteria: direct flame passage, cotton waste ignition, and load bearing performance. This means that certain restrictions must be imposed on the materials to be added and on the loading conditions. One restriction is that a new layer, if applied to the exposed surface, must not produce additional thermal stresses in the construction, i.e., its thermal expansion characteristics must be similar to those of the adjacent layer. Each new layer must also be capable of contributing enough additional strength to the assembly to sustain the added dead load. If this requirement is not fulfilled, the allowable live load must be reduced by an amount equal to the weight of the new layer. Because of these limitations, this rule should not be applied without careful consideration.

Particular care must be taken if the material added is a good thermal insulator. Properly located, the added insulation could improve the “thermal” performance of the assembly. Improperly located, the insulation could block necessary thermal transmission through the assembly, thereby subjecting the structural elements to greater temperatures for longer periods of time, and could cause premature structural failure of the supporting members.

Rule 3: The fire endurance of constructions containing continuous air gaps or cavities is greater than the fire endurance of similar constructions of the same weight, but containing no air gaps or cavities.

By providing for voids in a construction, additional resistances are produced in the path of heat flow. Numerical heat flow analyses indicate that a 10 to 15 percent increase in fire endurance can be achieved by creating an air gap at the midplane of a brick wall. Since the gross volume is also increased by the presence of voids, the air gaps and cavities have a beneficial effect on stability as well. However, constructions containing combustible materials within an air gap may be regarded as exceptions to this rule because of the possible development of burning in the gap.

There are numerous examples of this rule in the tables. For instance:

Table 1.1.4; Item W-8-M-82: Cored concrete masonry, nominal 8 inch thick wall with one unit in wall thickness and with 62 percent minimum of solid material in each unit, load bearing (80 PSI). Fire endurance: 2¹/₂ hours.

Table 1.1.5; Item W-10-M-11: Cored concrete masonry, nominal 10 inch thick wall with two units in wall thickness and a 2-inch (51 mm) air space, load bearing (80 PSI). The units are essentially the same as item W-8-M-82. Fire endurance: 3¹/₂ hours.

These walls show 1 hour greater fire endurance by the addition of the 2-inch (51 mm) air space.

Rule 4: The farther an air gap or cavity is located from the exposed surface, the more beneficial is its effect on the fire endurance.

Radiation dominates the heat transfer across an air gap or cavity, and it is markedly higher where the temperature is higher.

1. The “thermal” fire endurance is the time at which the average temperature on the unexposed side of a construction exceeds its initial value by 250° when the other side is exposed to the “standard” fire specified by ASTM Test Method E-19.

The air gap or cavity is thus a poor insulator if it is located in a region which attains high temperatures during fire exposure.

Some of the clay tile designs take advantage of these factors. The double cell design, for instance, ensures that there is a cavity near the unexposed face. Some floor/ceiling assemblies have air gaps or cavities near the top surface and these enhance their thermal performance.

Rule 5: The fire endurance of a construction cannot be increased by increasing the thickness of a completely enclosed air layer.

Harmathy notes that there is evidence that if the thickness of the air layer is larger than about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (12.7 mm), the heat transfer through the air layer depends only on the temperature of the bounding surfaces, and is practically independent of the distance between them. This rule is not applicable if the air layer is not completely enclosed, i.e., if there is a possibility of fresh air entering the gap at an appreciable rate.

Rule 6: Layers of materials of low thermal conductivity are better utilized on that side of the construction on which fire is more likely to happen.

As in Rule 4, the reason lies in the heat transfer process, though the conductivity of the solid is much less dependent on the ambient temperature of the materials. The low thermal conductor creates a substantial temperature differential to be established across its thickness under transient heat flow conditions. This rule may not be applicable to materials undergoing physico-chemical changes accompanied by significant heat absorption or heat evolution.

Rule 7: The fire endurance of asymmetrical constructions depends on the direction of heat flow.

This rule is a consequence of Rules 4 and 6 as well as other factors. This rule is useful in determining the relative protection of corridors and stairwells from the surrounding spaces. In addition, there are often situations where a fire is more likely, or potentially more severe, from one side or the other.

Rule 8: The presence of moisture, if it does not result in explosive spalling, increases the fire endurance.

The flow of heat into an assembly is greatly hindered by the release and evaporation of the moisture found within cementitious materials such as gypsum, portland cement, or magnesium oxychloride. Harmathy has shown that the gain in fire endurance may be as high as 8 percent for each percent (by volume) of moisture in the construction. It is the moisture chemically bound within the construction material at the time of manufacture or processing that leads to increased fire endurance. There is no direct relationship between the relative humidity of the air in the pores of the material and the increase in fire endurance.

Under certain conditions there may be explosive spalling of low permeability cementitious materials such as dense concrete. In general, one can assume that extremely old concrete has developed enough minor cracking that this factor should not be significant.

Rule 9: Load-supporting elements, such as beams, girders and joists, yield higher fire endurances when subjected to fire endurance tests as parts of floor, roof, or ceiling assemblies than they would when tested separately.

One of the fire endurance test criteria is the ability of a load-supporting element to carry its design load. The element will be deemed to have failed when the load can no longer be supported.

Failure usually results for two reasons. Some materials, particularly steel and other metals, lose much of their structural strength at elevated temperatures. Physical deflection of the supporting element, due to decreased strength or thermal expansion, causes a redistribution of the load forces and stresses throughout the element. Structural failure often results because the supporting element is not designed to carry the redistributed load.

Roof, floor, and ceiling assemblies have primary (e.g., beams) and secondary (e.g., floor joists) structural members. Since the primary load-supporting elements span the largest distances, their deflection becomes significant at a stage when the strength of the secondary members (including the roof or floor surface) is hardly affected by the heat. As the secondary members follow the deflection of the primary load-supporting element, an increasingly larger portion of the load is transferred to the secondary members.

When load-supporting elements are tested separately, the imposed load is constant and equal to the design load throughout the test. By definition, no distribution of the load is possible because the element is being tested by itself. Without any other structural members to which the load could be transferred, the individual elements cannot yield a higher fire endurance than they do when tested as parts of a floor, roof or ceiling assembly.

Rule 10: The load-supporting elements (beams, girders, joists, etc.) of a floor, roof, or ceiling assembly can be replaced by such other load-supporting elements which, when tested separately, yielded fire endurances not less than that of the assembly.

This rule depends on Rule 9 for its validity. A beam or girder, if capable of yielding a certain performance when tested separately, will yield an equally good or better performance when it forms a part of a floor, roof, or ceiling assembly. It must be emphasized that the supporting element of one assembly must not be replaced by the supporting element of another assembly if the performance of this latter element is not known from a separate (beam) test. Because of the load-reducing effect of the secondary elements that results from a test performed on an assembly, the performance of the supporting element alone cannot be evaluated by simple arithmetic. This rule also indicates the advantage of performing separate fire tests on primary load-supporting elements.

ILLUSTRATION OF HARMATHY'S RULES

Harmathy provided one schematic figure which illustrated his Rules.¹ It should be useful as a quick reference to assist in applying his Rules.

EXAMPLE APPLICATION OF HARMATHY'S RULES

The following examples, based in whole or in part upon those presented in Harmathy's paper (35), show how the Rules can be applied to practical cases.

Example 1

Problem

A contractor would like to keep a partition which consists of a $3\frac{3}{4}$ inch (95 mm) thick layer of red clay brick, a $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch (32 mm) thick layer of plywood, and a $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (9.5 mm) thick layer of gypsum wallboard, at a location where 2-hour fire endurance is required. Is this assembly capable of providing a 2-hour protection?

Solution

- (1) This partition does not appear in the Appendix Tables.
- (2) Bricks of this thickness yield fire endurance of approximately 75 minutes (Table 1.1.2, Item W-4-M-2).
- (3) The $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch (32 mm) thick plywood has a finish rating of 30 minutes.
- (4) The $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (9.5 mm) gypsum wallboard has a finish rating of 10 minutes.
- (5) Using the recommended values from the tables and applying Rule 1, the fire endurance (FI) of the assembly is larger than the sum of the individual layers, or

$$FI > 75 + 30 + 10 = 115 \text{ minutes}$$

Discussion

This example illustrates how the Appendix Tables can be utilized to determine the fire resistance of assemblies not explicitly listed.

Example 2

Problem

- (1) A number of buildings to be rehabilitated have the same type of roof slab which is supported with different structural elements.
- (2) The designer and contractor would like to determine whether or not this roof slab is capable of yielding a 2-hour fire endurance. According to a rigorous interpretation of ASTM E 119, however, only the roof assembly, including the roof slab as well as the cover and the supporting elements, can be subjected to a fire test. Therefore, a fire endurance classification cannot be issued for the slabs separately.
- (3) The designer and contractor believe this slab will yield a 2-hour fire endurance even without the cover, and any beam of at least 2-hour fire endurance will provide satisfactory support. Is it possible to obtain a classification for the slab separately?

Solution

- (1) The answer to the question is yes.

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- (2) According to Rule 10 it is not contrary to common sense to test and classify roofs and supporting elements separately. Furthermore, according to Rule 2, if the roof slabs actually yield a 2 hour fire endurance, the endurance of an assembly, including the slabs, cannot be less than 2 hours.
- (3) The recommended procedure would be to review the tables to see if the slab appears as part of any tested roof or floor/ceiling assembly. The supporting system can be regarded as separate from the slab specimen, and the fire endurance of the assembly listed in the table is at least the fire endurance of the slab. There would have to be an adjustment for the weight of the roof cover in the allowable load if the test specimen did not contain a cover.
- (4) The supporting structure or element would have to have at least a 2-hour fire endurance when tested separately.

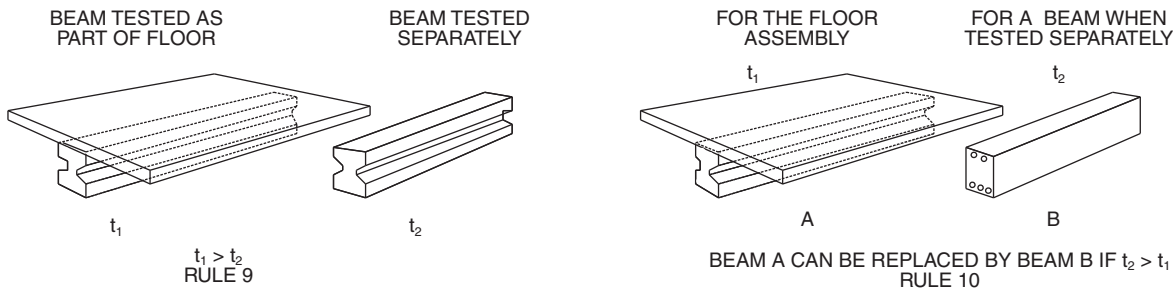
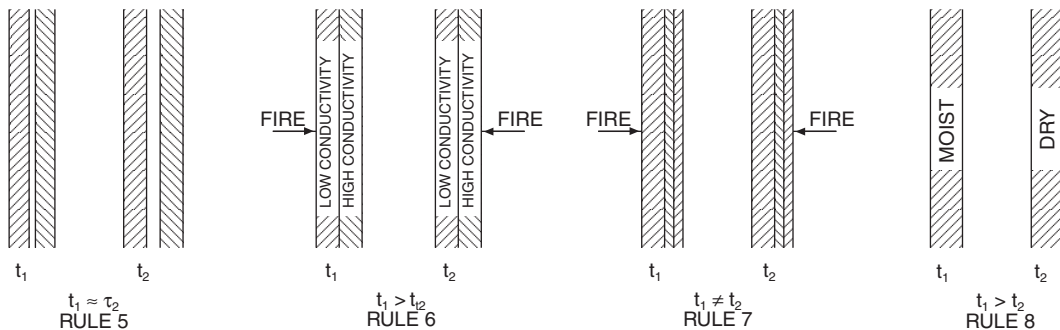
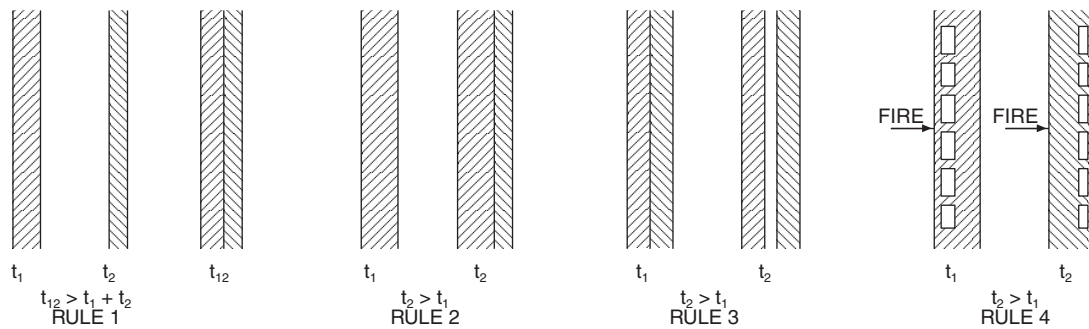
Discussion

If the tables did not include tests on assemblies which contained the slab, one procedure would be to assemble the roof slabs on any convenient supporting system (not regarded as part of the specimen) and to subject them to a load which, besides the usually required superimposed load, includes some allowances for the weight of the cover.

Example 3

Problem

A steel-joisted floor and ceiling assembly is known to have yielded a fire endurance of 1 hour and 35 minutes. At a certain location, a 2-hour endurance is required. What is the most economical way of increasing the fire endurance by at least 25 minutes?



Diagrammatic illustration of ten rules.
t = fire endurance

Solution

- (1) The most effective technique would be to increase the ceiling plaster thickness. Existing coats of paint would have to be removed and the surface properly prepared before the new plaster could be applied. Other materials (e.g., gypsum wallboard) could also be considered.
- (2) There may be other techniques based on other principles, but an examination of the drawings would be necessary.

Discussion

- (1) The additional plaster has at least three effects:
 - a) The layer of plaster is increased and thus there is a gain of fire endurance (Rule 1).
 - b) There is a gain due to shifting the air gap farther from the exposed surface (Rule 4).
 - c) There is more moisture in the path of heat flow to the structural elements (Rules 7 and 8).
- (2) The increase in fire endurance would be at least as large as that of the finish rating for the added thickness of plaster. The combined effects in (1) above would further increase this by a factor of 2 or more, depending upon the geometry of the assembly.

Example 4

Problem

The fire endurance of item W-10-M-1 in Table 1.1.5 is 4 hours. This wall consists of two $3\frac{3}{4}$ inch (95 mm) thick layers of structural tiles separated by a 2-inch (51 mm) air gap and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (19 mm) portland cement plaster or stucco on both sides. If the actual wall in the building is identical to item W-10-M-1 except that it has a 4-inch (102 mm) air gap, can the fire endurance be estimated at 5 hours?

Solution

The answer to the question is no for the reasons contained in Rule 5.

Example 5

Problem

In order to increase the insulating value of its precast roof slabs, a company has decided to use two layers of different concretes. The lower layer of the slabs, where the strength of the concrete is immaterial (all the tensile load is carried by the steel reinforcement), would be made with a concrete of low strength but good insulating value. The upper layer, where the concrete is supposed to carry the compressive load, would remain the original high strength, high thermal conductivity concrete. How will the fire endurance of the slabs be affected by the change?

Solution

The effect on the thermal fire endurance is beneficial:

- (1) The total resistance to heat flow of the new slabs has been increased due to the replacement of a layer of high thermal conductivity by one of low conductivity.
- (2) The layer of low conductivity is on the side more likely to be exposed to fire, where it is more effectively utilized according to Rule 6. The layer of low thermal conductivity also provides better protection for the steel reinforcement, thereby extending the time before reaching the temperature at which the creep of steel becomes significant.