# **Designing Rooftop Paving Slabs for Wind Effects**

*PAV-MAN-007*



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#### **INTRODUCTION**

This manual focuses on the selection, design, and specification of pavement systems for rooftop applications. In particular, this section will focus on "segmental concrete paving slabs," for rooftop applications.

#### **DESIGN PROCEDURE CHECKLIST**

The objective of this section is to provide the contractor or designer of record (DOR) with a procedural checklist for selecting, designing, and specifying a segmental concrete paving slab system for a rooftop application. It is imperative to note that many of the following checklist items simply do not apply for paving systems at grade.

- **1. Consult a professional structural engineer.** This is extremely important because there are some aspects of designing rooftop paving systems that are just too complex for the lay person—or even nonengineering design professionals. To correctly design and install a rooftop paving system requires familiarity with structural engineering codes and publications for the determination of the environmental forces to which the paving system will be subjected. In addition, a structural engineer will be key in helping to ensure that there is a complete "load path," (see below), perhaps the most important aspect of the design of the concrete paving slabs.
- **2. Collect the necessary design information for the structural engineer.**

There are several given parameters that the engineer will require to determine the forces on the paving system. These parameters include the following information:

a. The proposed site location of the building; This is required to determine which building code(s) will be applicable. For instance, in the United States, the International Building Code (IBC) is modified by the individual state codes (e.g.—the California Building Code and the Florida Building Code). Similarly, in Canada, the National Building Code of Canada (NBCC) is modified by the individual provincial codes (e.g.—the Ontario Building Code and the British Columbia Building Code).

Additionally, the location of the building would determine which design codes (per structural materials; such as steel, concrete, timber, and steel) would be applicable. For example, consider steel design. In the United States, the American Institute of Steel Construction (AISC 360) would be the governing basic steel specification. In Canada, the governing steel design specification would be the Standards Council of Canada (CAN/ CSA S16).

Key environmental loads (such as the wind

velocity to be considered, environmental exposure, seismic parameters, snow loads, etc.) also vary greatly per the proposed location. In particular, the wind load is influenced greatly by the exposure condition surrounding the proposed location. Additionally, in areas of high seismicity, the decision on which type of rooftop paving system (or, the feasibility of whether to use a rooftop paving system at all) may need to be considered.

All of these various environmental loads, along with the structural dead load, are combined, per the above-mentioned building codes, to arrive at the controlling load combinations for the design.

b. The proposed use and/or occupancy of the building;

This information is used to determine the risk category of the building; that is, the importance factors that will be used for determining the individual, discrete loads for the design of the paving system.

- c. The proposed overall geometry of the building (e.g.—design drawings); The geometry (i.e.—the major architectural aspects of the building) are extremely influential in the determination of the loads to which the building roof (and the overall building) is subjected. Some of the geometric aspects include:
	- i. The maximum height of the roof;
	- ii. The dimensions and shape of the roof;
	- iii. The location and number of major openings (e.g.—to determine if the building is "open", "enclosed"/"partiallyopen", or "partially-enclosed").
	- iv. The slope of the roof (given that the discussion is on rooftop paving systems, we'll assume that the roof is a low-slope roof);
	- v. Major appurtenances or mechanical equipment that will be on the roof;
	- vi. A general scheme for how the roof will drain (e.g.—plumbed drains, scuppers, etc.); and,
	- vii. The edge condition of the roof (e.g.—will there be parapets at the perimeter of the roof?).
- d. The proposed roofing system, the roof framing structural system and framing layout for the building;
	- i. Is the roof framing steel? (e.g.—steel wide-flange beams and/or open- web steel joists)
- ii. If the roof framing is steel, what is the infill? (e.g.—steel decking and/or concrete slab)
- iii. Is the roof framing concrete with a slab?
- iv. Is the roof framing wood (sawn timbers or dimensional lumber) with plywood/OSB infill?
- e. If applicable, the age of the existing building;
	- i. Is the building new construction or remodel/retrofit of an existing building?
	- ii. What was the original use/occupancy of the building?
	- iii. What were the original design loads considered for the building; in particular, for the building roof?

#### **3. Select some preliminary systems (manufacturers/ makes/models) that you prefer to be used for the design.**

If you have a good idea of the system that you'd like to use for the design, provide this information to the structural engineer. Each manufacturer's proprietary systems have their own set of idiosyncrasies that will need to be considered in the design. In fact, some manufacturer's systems will simply not be appropriate for some design applications. This is why it's important to communicate which specifc product you may have in mind; and, also to have an alternate, just in case your first choice of system does not lend itself to the application.

#### **4. Maintain communication with your structural engineer.**

Communication is key to a successful design. Make sure to share any information that you think may be important. Some examples of extra information that would be important to the design include:

- a. Making the engineer aware if some design parameters are still undecided;
- b. Making the engineer aware if some design parameters are "set in stone";
- c. If you're an architect, consider giving your engineer access to speak to the contractor to ask questions or gather additional information; or,
- d. If you're a contractor, consider giving your engineer access to speak to the architect to ask questions or gather additional information.

### **WHAT IS THE "LOAD PATH"?**

In order to help understand the concept of "load path", consider this question: What is the role of a structural engineer? The answer is: To ensure that all loads applied to a structure are safely transmitted to the ground. The way that the loads are transmitted through the structure, and ultimately to the ground, is the "load path". Another way to think of the "load path" is like a "chain" that runs through the components/ elements of a structure. You don't want a weak leak in the "chain"; and, you definitely don't want a break in the chain (i.e.—a missing link), or there will be a failure of the structural system. That is, the loads will not be safely transmitted all the way to the ground.

Though this seems like "common sense, the necessity for the provision of a "load path" is even recognized in the building code. For instance, in the United States, the International Building Code (IBC) emphasizes the concept of a "load path" in Section 1616 ("Structural Integrity").

Here's a "real world" example of load path to help illustrate the concept. Refer to **Figures 1 and 2** (below). You can see that one can very simply follow the load path from the beginning (i.e.—the application of the load) to the end (i.e.—the safe transmittal of the load to the ground).

#### Load Origin illustrated in **Figure 1**:

- 1. As wind flow moves across the rooftop of a building (particularly, a low-slope roof), the wind induces an uplift pressure to the entire roof and all of the rooftop components.
- 2. The rooftop paving slabs have a weight (like all objects on earth that have mass).
- 3. If the rooftop paving slabs are not heavy enough to cancel out the uplift pressure due to the wind flow, we have a design issue (i.e.—an additional consideration); that is, we have a net uplift force (the uplift pressure applied to the surface of the paving slabs). Therefore, we must ensure that the paving slabs are held **down** to the roof.



**Figure 1:** Uplift pressure created by wind flow over a near-flat, low-slope rooftop with segmental concrete paving slabs; Note: for identification of individual system components, refer to **Figure 3** (below).

#### Time Out:

Stop and think about this! It may be intuitive that a structural system must be able to hold **up** a building. But, far less intuitive, is that a structural system, many times, also must be able to hold **down** a building. Here's another reason to bring in an experienced structural engineer. The engineer will be familiar with these concepts (like having to hold down a building just as much as having to hold it up).

Still not a believer? Do a quick online search for videos of the destruction of homes in high winds (e.g.—tropical storms, hurricanes, or tornados). (Check this out: search "IBHS edgemetal failure demonstration" on YouTube.) Almost always, the first thing that happens (if the building wasn't properly built to resist the uplift with appropriate hold- downs and straps) is that the roof covering lifts off the building, followed by structural failure (1). Then, the walls blow away. Hasta la vista! Again, this is a good example that illustrates how people sometimes forget that a structural system has to work both ways effectively—that is, the structural system has to: (1) be able to hold a building up; and (2) be able to hold a building down.

#### Deep Dive:

Detailed information on engineering physics is far beyond the scope of this document. But, those interested in the physics of how wind affects our structures should research the following topics: "fluid dynamics" (yes; air behaves like a fluid), "conservation of energy", and the "Bernoulli Effect". In a nutshell, as the wind flows over a building at the windward face, the air has to speed up (refer to **Figure 2**). The conservation of energy states that if the velocity increases, the air pressure must decrease. This is why some areas on a building (like the roof, sides and leeward face) develop this negative pressure (or suction). This is known as the "Bernoulli Effect". Here's another interesting fact: This is how airplanes fly! Look it up!



**Figure 2:** Uplift pressures created by wind flow over a typical building; Note that the arrows on the building surfaces indicate the direction of the pressures resulting from the wind flow. In particular, note the negative pressure, or uplift pressure on the roof of the building.

Let's take a look at a complete structural load path for a rooftop concrete paving system. Refer to **Figure 3**, below.

#### Load Path illustrated in **Figure 3:**

1. The segmental concrete paving slabs are held down to the pedestals.

 There are several ways proprietary systems hold down the paving slabs. For example, some use hold-downs at the corners of the paving slabs; and some are even hidden on the side of the paving slabs.

- 2. The pedestals are held down to the single-ply, Thermoplastic Polyolefin (TPO) roof membrane. This is usually done by an appropriate adhesive. The adhesive must be compatible with the TPO single-ply roof membrane.
- 3. The single-ply TPO roof membrane is held down to the polyisocyanurate insulation (ISO) by an appropriate adhesive.
- 4. The polyisocyanurate insulation (ISO) is held down to the structural infill of the roof (in this case, steel roof

decking). This is accomplished using steel screws through the oriented strand board (OSB) nailer on the ISO (in this case, part of the ISO insulation product that is glued to the insulation) into the steel decking.

- 5. The steel roof decking is held down to the open-web steel joists with welds and/or steel deck screws (i.e. self-drilling/self-tapping TEK screws).
- 6. The open-web steel joists are held down at their connections to the masonry walls or primary steel framing (steel wide-flange girders).
- 7. In the case of the masonry walls, the walls (not shown) carry the loads from the steel open-web joists down to the ground (i.e.—strip footings; not shown).
- 8. In the case of the primary steel framing, the girders (not shown) carry the loads back to the columns (not shown). The columns then carry the loads down to the ground (i.e.—isolated footings; not shown).



**Figure 3**: Load path for a segmental concrete paving system installed on a rooftop of a building; Note that numbers denote load path (refer to the body of the text); and, lower-case letters denote the system components: (a) concrete paving slab; (b) adjustable pedestal supports; (c) single-ply roof membrane; (d) polyisocyanurate (ISO) insulation with bonded wood layer (OSB) for screw connections; (e) steel roof deck; (f) open-web steel joist.

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Note that is an example to illustrate the concept of load path. Obviously, this represents just one possible configuration of: segmental concrete paving system, built-up roofing system, and structural system. The possible combinations between these components are seemingly endless [e.g.—all types of commercially-available paving products, with all different types of roofing systems, and all different types of structural systems (concrete walls, concrete framing, steel framing, masonry walls, timber framing, etc.)]. The overall point is that it is essential that a continuous load path is provided however, the load path needs to be modified for your system configuration; that is, your proprietary system of concrete paving slabs (and components), roofing system, and structural system. Again, the bottom line is that the resistance to wind uplift relies heavily upon the attachment between the various roof assembly layers and components; all of which should be reviewed by a structural engineer.

Example calculations for the analysis of wind uplift on roofs is done using *ASCE 7: Minimum Design Loads and Associated Criteria for Buildings and Other Structures* (2) in the U.S. or in Canada the *NBCC: National Building Code of Canada* (3).

#### **REFERENCES:**

- 1. "A Recommendation for an ENHANCED FUJITA SCALE", Texas Tech University Lubbock, Texas, 2006 https://www.depts.ttu.edu/nwi/Pubs/ EnhancedFujitaScale/EnhancedFujitaScale.php
- 2. ASCE 7 Minimum Design Loads and Associated Criteria for Buildings and Other Structures, American Society of Civil Engineers, Reston, VA.
- 3. National Building Code of Canada, National Research Council Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 2020.

## **APPENDIX A**

**Example calculation using ASCE 7: Minimum Design Loads and Associated Criteria for Buildings and Other Structures**



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# **APPENDIX B**

**Example Calculations using NBCC: National Building Code of Canada 2015** 









- The resistance design/check of the paver slabs and the pedestals to downward gravity loads (snow, roof live load, and dead load) are not part of these calculations. - The structural resistance of the building framing is outside the scope of these calculations. This design example is limited to the effects of wind uplift on the paver slabs only.

Seismic loads and their effects are not part of these calculations.







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- A positive pressure coefficient indicates pressure against the bottom surface of the paver.

#### Table 4.1.7.7. **Internal Pressure Coefficients** Forming Part of Sentence 4.1.7.7.(1)



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