

Moving **Up** a Notch

Big panels and gangforming systems change the face of forming

by *Vanessa A.T. Hoy*

Pouring walls used to mean foundation work, but no longer. These days, poured wall contractors are doing it all—foundations as well as concrete homes, large commercial projects, and tall wall applications. The emergence of big panel systems and the continued interest in gangforming systems are reshaping the poured wall world as contractors embrace methods that increase capacity, reduce labor dependence, and open new markets.

Dallas Myers, Tuf-N-Lite, recently visited East Coast contractors who were building divider walls for apartment buildings, firewalls, and storage facilities using big panel systems. He was impressed by what he saw. “Those [big panel] forms are so much faster and cheaper than masonry that it’s not even funny!” he says. “They just pour them all the way up to the roof.”

It’s a big opportunity for our industry, he adds. “People have been using big gangforms for years. There are all kinds of big systems out there, but this is different,” he says. “This is something the poured wall guys can use.”

While gangforming systems and adapters have been on the market for several decades, big panel construction, in which contractors crane-set large panels, for example, 8' x 10' forms, has just evolved over the past few years. Charles Engelken, Wall-Ties and Forms, says they developed their big panel system four years ago when European systems started coming to the U.S. One of the newest big panel systems on the market is B.E.P. Forming Systems, which accommodates widths of up to 24'. (See review on page 26.)

The trend is just beginning to take off. Ed Sauter, Concrete Foundations

Association (CFA), says now that a growing number of contractors have boom trucks and other lifting devices, gangforming and big panel systems have become a more practical option. But just how practical depends on whether you have the right type of projects for these systems.

Residential foundation construction doesn’t generally call for long, tall spans or large rectangular footprints. Branford, CT, foundation contractor Richard Crosby says most of the contractors he talks to agree that houses are getting larger and the designs busier. “Even the tract homes the large developers manufacture are more eye-pleasing. They have more 45° angles than before,” he adds. “Residential design is much more broken up now. We’re seeing more recessed doorways, bow windows and bow projections.”

For those with mainly residential foundation projects, gangforming may be a more economical means of handling repetitious pours or venturing into the larger commercial market. “If you have the ability to do that type of work two to three times a year and those jobs represent 2-3% of your total business for the year, it



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GANGS AWAY (above): For projects with longer wall spans, gangforming can be a cost-effective alternative to handsetting panels, particularly for larger projects or repetitive pours. Here a crane lifts a ganged panel and sets it into place.

BIG PANELS make quick work of tall wall projects minus the labor for ganging handset panels together.



B.E.P. Forming Systems

makes more sense to use your own handset forms and rent gangforming accessories (walers, high-capacity ties, and the means to attach the walers to the forms) and a lifting device,” says Mike Mayfield, Symons Corporation.

In a typical gangforming scenario, contractors bolt their handset forms together using a filler piece or gang adapter. The system generally includes steel walers, lifting brackets, and high-capacity ties. Contractors determine the size of their gang based on the capacity of their lifting device, such as a crane or boom truck. “By using high-capacity ties, contractors often save money on the rental of gangforming components compared to using individual ties for a handset system,” Mayfield says, “plus they reduce labor costs. A job that would have required 12 workers to handset now only requires three. So all that labor saving becomes a bonus...direct profit.”

Whether you're interested in gangforming or big panels, the key is finding a method that works with what you have. “If the system is not adaptable, you may

have to buy a whole new filler system,” cautions Engelken.

Do a reality check when it comes to your workload. The taller the walls, the more advantage these systems have over handsetting. Do you have enough large or repetitive projects to support your investment in a new system, or would it be more cost-effective to rent the accessories to gang your forms for the few large projects you handle?

The research may be worth it. For now, insiders say the trend toward bigger panels is just starting to take off among the leading poured wall contractors. Will it be a viable method in applications other than tall walls and commercial projects? Perhaps. “A lot of people are trying,” says Engelken. “That’s good, because hopefully they can work out some of the issues that are a challenge now.” ▀



Symons Corp

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