



Masonry Mortar

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Mortar Compressive Strength

By: Brian Petty
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Mortar is generally understood only in the least necessary terms to its user. The Architect/Engineer wants it to perform structurally (according to the specified compressive strength /Code requirements / psi) and aesthetically. The CM, GC and Mason Contractor want it to meet the specification. The mortar tender wants it to work for the bricklayer. The bricklayer wants to be able to handle it easily. And project specifications reference mortar quality control procedures on site by evaluating field strengths.

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Mortar Bond Strength

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Masonry mortars can be specified by their "Type" (M, S or N). Type M,S, or N mortars can be designed to meet specific properties OR proportions (but not both). Someone can want a Type N mortar that's proportioned as 1:1:6 or a Type N mortar that at least gets to 750 psi but specifying a 1:1:6 versus a 750 min. psi mortar are completely different things that will probably generate very different mortars. Much research has been performed for decades on hardened masonry mortar performance related not only to it's compressive strength but to its flexibility, bond, durability, air content, setting times, water resistance, vapor transmission rates, blast resistance, radiation shielding capability, fire resistance, sound transmission... Some of these values can be associated with the Type specified, but for now I want to focus on Bond.

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Field Testing Mortar

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Masonry mortars are governed, designed and specified according to ASTM C 270.

Mortars are evaluated for their quality according to ASTM C 780.

It is not allowed to field test mortars according to C 780 to find out if they meet the C 270 compressive strength requirements.

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