

Freedom from brick and mortar

Drywall or gypsum-based plasterboard is a lighter and faster way to build interior walls and they are stronger too

S SHYAMALA

THE drywall method, a lighter and faster way of interior construction, is slowly catching up in the country. Though the technique has been in use in rest of the world for quite some time, it is growing popular in India only now.

Gypsum-based plasterboards (normally used in false ceilings) are pressed between two thick sheets of paper and then kiln-dried to serve as interior walls. This replaces the traditional brick-and-mortar wet construction method. Pre-fabricated boards only need to be fastened and joined, requiring less labour and setting time.

Drywalls are 8-10 times lighter than normal walls, offering more floor space. As far as construction is concerned, it is 3-4 times faster because the boards are ready-to-use, said John Nelson, global marketing manager of Saint-Gobain Gyproc, the UK. The company specialises in the production of gypsum-based boards. The market for plaster boards (now used mostly in ceilings) in India is about 25 million sq mt, of which the company sells 20 million sq mt.

"Worldwide, drywalls have been the preferred solution recommended by architects for use in offices, hotels, hospitals and residences. Over 80 per cent of all interior construction in the developed



markets across all applications is with drywalls," he added.

Though drywalls are not as strong as brick walls, they are strong enough to meet interior requirements, John Nelson said. The walls are tested extensively to meet global fire safety, insulation and acoustic standards, he added. The method is also advantageous while renovating or expanding existing buildings. Globally, about 35 per cent of drywall solutions cater to the renovation segment, Nelson said.

The technique is now being used in some commercial and office spaces such as IT companies in India, said E Indumathy, a Chennai-based architect. Lack of

awareness about the method is the only reason why it is still not widely used in the country, she added. Traditions are hard to break and contractors have not yet understood the advantages of this method, she said. Taller the buildings, lighter should be the materials used. Most skyscrapers across the world use drywall solutions.

Drywall solutions eliminate the need to construct deep foundations. While normal walls have a thickness of 4.5 inches, drywalls come at about 19 to 20 mm, she said. The solutions can be customised to suit individual requirements of various rooms. Drywalls offer passive fire protection and, on an average, reduce decibel levels between 10 and 20 db.

Another important advantage of the method is that drywalls are easy to replace and repair. Interior spaces can be more easily reorganised compared with traditional brick walls. The implementation requires minimum skills and most residential solutions are "do-it-yourself kind", as in western countries.

According to Archana Vinodkumar, an independent designer, the cost of drywall construction would be cumulatively less than the normal wet construction method as the former requires smaller investment in foundations and increases available space. ■

shyamalaseetharaman
@mydigitalfc.com

