

Dear SRCA Members,

First I would like to thank the SRCA for inviting me to attend the 59<sup>th</sup> annual IFD Congress. It was both educational and inspiring with lots of fun and entertainment mixed throughout the Congress. I also extended my trip beyond the IFD Congress and went on to London England and spent a few days there with some other slate professionals to further enhance my experience and exposure to European slate roof practices.

A large part of my motivation for attending this Congress was to better understand what the Europeans had in place in regards to unified installation standards as well as training programs for their apprentice slate and clay tile roofers.

What I was able to gather from my visit, particularly from talking to those that are more focused on these matters, is that each country has a pretty well established set of standards they consider as the correct traditional practice. Some countries such as, England, Scotland and Ireland for example have somewhat similar installation techniques, where as Germany and France are very different.

With the new European Union trade agreements well in place it now behooves these countries to establish uniform standards for the products they use and install which in turn can affect their installation techniques. Thus the IFD has been working with its European members to that end.

Despite the challenges that the Europeans may have with their product standards, they are well established and successful in their actual apprenticeship training programs. This is well represented in the now bi-annual IFD World Championship for Young Roofers Competition. From what I have gathered, each country to varying degrees has some sort of official apprenticeship program that is either regulated by their respective governments and/or within the slate and clay tile industry itself. These programs have resulted in raising the craftsmanship standards, professionalism and most interestingly the perceived worth in the marketplace as a true professional along the same lines as a doctor or lawyer in some countries.

This is where we in the U.S. have some work cut out for ourselves *if* we in the slate and clay tile industry want to really push the trade and overall industry up to a level where being identified as a slate or clay tile installer is considered and valued as a real professional and distinguished from less skilled roofers that install inferior materials.

This achieved, would certainly benefit all involved in our industry from the quarriers to the distributors to the contractors to the installers and last but certainly not least our customers!

Sincerely,  
Gary Howes  
Executive Vice-President  
The Durable Slate Company