

PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Sub-floor Drainage System

The individual components of the WaterGuard system will look familiar, if you've installed sub-floor sump pumps and PVC drainage channels. But this package integrates these and other old ideas into an efficient, cost-effective system.

When we began researching this product, we asked the company to supply one or two referrals from satisfied customers. In response, they sent us about 200 post-installation assessments, many of them glowing.

Mark Tice, a builder in Shelton, Conn., says his company, Tice Brothers, has "eliminated call-backs" since he started installing WaterGuard systems. "What you need to do is talk to your building inspector and see if they'll accept the system instead of footer drains. Then it's only a couple hundred bucks more per house—that's

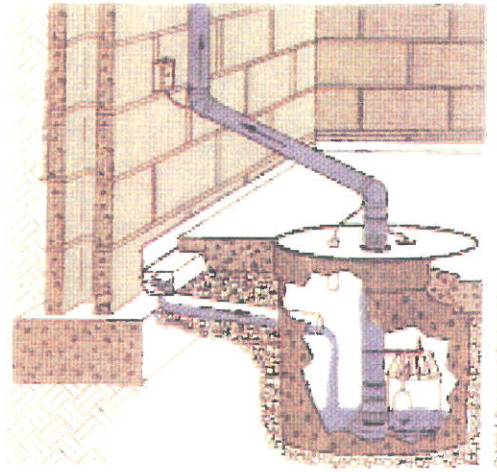
for us—we build a lot of big houses. This system allows me to give my customers a guarantee, even if we install it."

WaterGuard has several advantages over the old sink-hole-type sub-floor systems:

- The SuperSump pumping unit installs neatly and compactly in a sub-floor sinkhole. A gasketed cover also may prevent radon gas from leaking.

- Pumps can be equipped with a battery-powered UltraSump backup system, for homeowners who want 24-hour protection. The company claims a single battery will last 10 years.

- For further security, the company can tie in a WaterWatch Alarm that notifies owners immediately if the sump pump fails.



The WaterGuard pump system is kept separate from sub-floor soil, to prevent clogging. In addition, a flange between the floor and wall catches dirt and debris, yet allows wall moisture to drain.

Basement Systems (800-638-7048), the manufacturer, has 80 dealers nationwide and has won two awards in the past two years from the Better Business Bureau. For information, Circle no. 640.

Shortages May Spread

With the continuation of the current building boom, the shortages in building materials that began with drywall are making inroads into other supplies. Building materials experts don't think these products will suffer drywall-like conditions, but spot shortages have been reported in brick, lumber, and insulation.

"Nothing really compares with the drywall shortage in severity and broadness," says Jesse Brand, president of Brands Lumber of Columbus, Ind., and chairman of the board of the National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association.

But Brand does see a coming shortage in fiberglass insulation. "Right now we're in a lull before the storm," he says.

Lumber's Steep Hike

	1998 July price*	1999 July price*	Percent increase
Structural lumber composite	\$349	\$473	36%
Panel lumber composite	\$285	\$434	52%

*per 1,000 board feet

These structural lumber and panel composite numbers represent the price of a bundle of forest products and are used as an overall measurement of prices of the lumber used in home building.

He predicts a major shortage in the fall, when consumer demand for insulation peaks with the changing weather.

Lumber is experiencing a substantial increase in price owing to greater demand (see chart). NAHB economist Michael Carliner says increases in lumber prices add about \$2,500 to the price of a new \$200,000 home. And, in some areas of the country, tight supplies have been exacerbated by transportation problems that are keeping lumber from dealers.

"We've heard a few comments about supplies, but more on price issues," says Jeff Redd, associate editor of *Random Lengths*, a weekly publication about North American forest products markets. "This is a market that is strong in all regions, so there's no ability for [a dealer or retailer] to get supplies from another region."

Problems may be looming for other materials, such as brick. "It's not that you cannot get brick," Brand says, "but you'd better like what your brick supplier has in stock."

Demand for wood structural panels is quite high, and supplies could become a problem if a rough tropical storm season occurs. As for roofing materials, Brand says that summer hailstorms can shift supplies to concentrated areas, worsening a situation where supplies are already spotty.

—Peter Bodensteiner