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Precast—A Better Way To Build.

Construction is coming back. Projections for this year show total construction at around \$568 billion dollars. This is a 32% increase since 2010, which was the low point in the recession for construction. The reviving market gives owners, architects, and contractors an opportunity to review their methods and materials and to update their choices to match the high-performance needs of building users.

Nearly half of the expected rebound in construction is expected on the residential side. Of the \$568 billion in total construction, \$246 billion will be residential. This represents an 18% increase over last year, and residential building is projected to grow at double-digit rates for a while. This is good news for the commercial market too. Residential construction serves as a general indicator for the overall economy and is fundamental to all segments of construction. Along with new residences, both single-family and multifamily, come support services: shopping centers, schools, roads, parking, healthcare facilities, etc.


Since the recession, many factors involving residential construction have changed. These include the average size of residences, types of rooms and spaces needed, amenities, and even the building codes, especially related to energy efficiency.

However, the general materials used to construct homes have not changed to match these evolving needs. Many areas of the country continue to use outdated construction methods and materials to build residences even while new codes drive us towards increased energy efficiency, less water vapor intrusion, and reductions in air infiltration/exfiltration. Also, common sense tells us to build more safe and resilient housing, especially in areas of storms, high winds, fires, etc.—and these areas are expanding. We have better options and technology at our disposal.

High-performance precast concrete offers a better way to build. It provides an optimal solution not just for large-scale projects, but for mid- and small-scale projects as well. Precast offers the aesthetic versatility to include or emulate brick, stone, siding, stucco, or any other finish desired by an owner. It also offers the structural versatility to serve as the primary structural system at the same time.

Precast concrete is extremely durable and requires little maintenance. Precast concrete wall systems can also provide superior energy efficiency, by combining continuous insulation, a continuous air barrier, and a vapor barrier in one system. This type of wall system also reduces the potential of mold and other water intrusion issues.

But wait, there's more! Precast concrete inherently provides passive fire protection, because its inorganic composition does not combust. It is also resilient, protecting against storms, high winds, flying debris, and other natural and manmade hazards. This benefit is the most significant, as we cannot put a price on human life. In addition, the cost of rebuilding after catastrophic events is high financially, emotionally, and socially. The opportunity to take steps to minimize this is now.

You can learn more about residential construction and the benefits of precast concrete in this issue of *Ascent*. Whether you are building a multistory condo or a single-family residence, precast concrete offers a better way to build. 

ASCENT On the cover: 2550 North Lakeview Drive, Chicago, Illinois (see page 24). Photo: High Concrete Group, LLC

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