

COMBINING PASSION WITH EXPERTISE: MEET VSI'S NEW TECHNICAL & PRODUCT CERTIFICATION CZAR

May 15, 2020 (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/blog/combining-passion-with-expertise-meet-vsis-new-technical-product-certification-czar/>) | by Don Browne

Get to Know Our Newest Team Member





It seems that those organizations that made all the right strategic moves at the beginning of the year are the ones best-suited in not only adapting to the COVID-19 crisis but creating new long-term growth opportunities.

A prime example is the Vinyl Siding Institute's (VSI) decision to hire quality assurance expert Sara Krompholz in January to take its product certification programs to a higher level of market acceptance.

As the new Director of Technical & Product Certification, Sara has been leveraging 12 years of experience in product testing and certification management to move the foundation program forward. It is not just her experience that matters here; it's her experience in working with VSI and its member companies in this critical area of the industry's mission that could make a far-reaching impact on the home building and construction trades.

"I was hired by Architectural Testing in 2008 to manage the VSI program, and have been involved in each of their product certification initiatives ever since," she said. Sara has also worked with VSI members, conducting plant inspections, reviewing ASTM test data results (<https://www.astm.org/>), managing color retention and developing strong relationships with member company staff.

The VSI has been an industry leader in driving product certification (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/certified-pros-and-products/certified-products/>) and technical requirements so that code officials and builders alike will take notice of the superior performance of polymeric siding in coastal and other high-wind areas, as well as regions with extreme climates. And since VSI is making positive strides in advocating for greater inclusion of vinyl siding and related products in various state-level building codes, the organization set a goal for 2020 to transcend its product certification and technical program from an internal mechanism to an established broader industry application to be rolled out in 2021 to buttress its government regulatory reform initiatives.

To achieve this objective, a key component of Sara's new role is the oversight of two VSI committees – the Certification Oversight Committee and the Technical Committee.

With the Certification Oversight Committee, Sara leads an initiative in moving the foundation program forward from its current self-certifying mechanism to a more robust accreditation program with testing by Intertek (<https://www.intertek.com/>) – her previous employer for the last 12 years.

"This will give us greater legitimacy," Sara asserts. "We will have a deliverable – VSI's own code evaluation program. When it's finalized and launched next year, we will make a diligent effort to generate a lot of excitement in the marketplace about our new program and its unique features."

When the new accreditation program is launched in 2021, Sara will work closely with Alex Fernandez, VSI's Director, Advocacy and Government Affairs, to help break down vinyl siding's barriers to spec by educating legislative teams, code officials and other stakeholders on the quality assurance of these products.

On the Technical Committee, Sara's main objective is to ensure that ASTM standards that support the program will remain current. This includes attending ASTM committee meetings and advocating for performance testing and scope expansion.

Sara sees her greatest challenges in this new role as being twofold. The first is leading product certification into uncharted territory while ensuring that existing program requirements are in place. The second is playing her part in helping polymeric siding gain greater market acceptance, an area in which she feels she is "new to the game."

Regarding the first challenge, Sara feels confident in both her abilities and experience and VSI's unique advantages as a lean organization forging new ground.

"As a keen observer of the vinyl siding industry's product certification practices, and as a vendor who has worked closely with the VSI and its members on many of these initiatives, I don't have to 'un-learn' any standard practices used by other industries which could slow us down," she said. "What's more, a lot of companies from the competition are so large that they don't have the focus or detail orientation that the vinyl siding industry has."

Regarding the second challenge, because of her vast experience with the VSI and its member companies, Sara feels that she has both the intimate knowledge and the strong ties with so many industry professionals and subject matter experts to help make a very compelling case for polymeric siding to the marketplace.

"I enjoy being part of the program and I feel more ingrained, more privy to insider info, and more invested in the industry's success," she notes. "Migrating from the inspection side to the VSI side, I am learning more about how VSI operates as an internal member of the team, and feel really good about proving my worth to VSI."

With a career focused on product performance, using wind and fire testing to make sure the data matches the performance objectives, Sara is both a passionate and expert match for her new VSI position. She knows the members, and knows their plants, and she can identify specific challenges for each plant right away. She will no doubt be a powerful resource in providing overall product performance education and thus, helping the industry gain desired levels of marketplace acceptance.

And as homebuilders and architects alike are navigating through the COVID-19 crisis with an unprecedented focus on sourcing the most durable, cost-effective materials, the addition of Sara to the VSI team could not have come at a better time.

Don Browne is a writer, entrepreneur and local legislator who believes that the power of words can change the world. He provides unique writing services for clients in the construction, health care, IT and hospitality sectors. He has a passion for small business and start-ups, as well as writing about Irish history, family and corporate biographies. As a homeowner and father of four who is passionate about community development, Don looks forward to writing more about the exciting possibilities of creating traditional neighborhoods and more sustainable communities using modern materials.

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