

TESTING AGREEMENT TO PROMOTE EXPORTS OF CANADIAN BUILDING PRODUCTS TO JAPAN

The Japanese Ministry of Construction (MOC) has selected Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC) as the first foreign laboratory designated to fire-test construction materials for the Japanese market.

Better access to Japanese market

As a result of this certification agreement signed in Tokyo last December, Canadian building products suppliers can now establish in Canada the fire ratings of building products they wish to certify for sale in the Japanese market, radically reducing the cost of testing for such companies and greatly simplifying their entry into this market.

Until the certification of ULC, testing of Canadian building products had to be carried out in Japan, making costs too high for many small and medium-sized Canadian firms.

Traditionally, Canada has been strong in the sale of wooden building materials to Japan, and some progress has been achieved in the standards area with respect to Canadian wood imports into Japan.

This agreement will now enable manufacturers of non-flammable exterior materials such as roofing, siding, windows and doors to begin seriously considering this market.

The Japanese building code requires that building products used on the exterior of houses must meet high standards for inflammability.

The certification of ULC — a non-profit Scarborough, Ontario, company accredited for testing, certification, and standards development — flows from the Joint Announcement on Co-operation on Building Product Standards, signed by Canada and Japan in 1994. The announcement involved mutual recognition of building

product standards.

The mutual recognition initiative's objectives are to eliminate duplication of testing, evaluation or certification procedures, to increase the availability in Japan of quality building materials from Canada, and to promote more efficient construction practices.

According to Minister for International Trade Roy MacLaren, "Easing technical barriers should stimulate exports of Canadian building products to Japan, yielding benefits to both countries."

Preference given to Canada

Under this initiative, qualified Canadian testing laboratories can approach the Japanese MOC to designate them as official Foreign Testing Organizations.

ULC is the first to be chosen after Japan's Building Research Institute determined that ULC was fully capable of carrying out fire tests of certain building products in accordance with Japanese standards.

This places Canada in the vanguard of other countries such as the U.S., France and Sweden, now pursuing similar discussions with MOC.

The MOC's choice of Canada to receive this precedent-setting honour reflects both Canada's ongoing commitment at all levels to expanding trade in this sector as well as MOC's high level of confidence in Canadian certification and testing institutions.

Further deregulation possible

In addition, the Foreign Testing application by Canada, which was

processed in record-breaking time by Japan's MOC, is symbolic of the excellent relations between Canada and Japan in the housing sector, and could be followed by further developments in the coming months.

As a matter of fact, along with the certification program, Canada and Japan are discussing other initiatives on deregulation and building standards which could lead to greater access for Canadian building products to the Japanese market.

Trade officials are hopeful that this agreement will lead to early progress on another priority issue in the mutual recognition talks for Canada, namely designation of the Canadian Construction Materials Centre (CCMC) — part of the National Research Council's (NRC) Institute for Research in Construction — as a Foreign Evaluation Body.

This would make the Centre certified to test non-standard building products to performance standards arrived at jointly by MOC and CCMC.

Importance for Canada

Canada sells about \$3 billion annually in building materials to Japan, making these products Canada's single largest export to that country. Finished building material exports are growing rapidly as North American-style finishing and design gain in popularity.

As for the timeliness of this agreement, ULC claims that it

*Continued on page 5 —
Canadian Building Products*