



Scott L. Melnick

Not too long ago, my oldest brother's youngest daughter came to me with a question about something I had written more than a dozen years earlier. Of all my sibling's progeny, Beth Ann is probably the most similar to me (though smarter, more athletic, and much more personable), so, unlike her parents, she appreciated my attempt at philosophical humor: Essentially, on her first birthday, I gave her a card with a long diatribe questioning why anyone would write a long message to someone too young to read or comprehend language.

But words have power—though all too often possess more than a modicum of ambiguity.

And the power of words was much in evidence during a recent discussion of the green attributes of steel.

While everyone can agree on the meaning of "recycled content" (which, for wide-flange beams and columns, incidentally, is at least 90%) there is another term out there—"recycling rate"—the meaning of which is less clear. In fact, as our recent discussion revealed, the government's definition is radically different than what I had assumed the phrase to mean: the amount of steel which was diverted from the waste stream into recycled products (and for that matter, my definition—which I thought was the obvious layman's definition—didn't agree with what my wife's best friend Sandee assumed the term meant). So given the extensive confusion over the term, and so as not to get into an argument with the Environmental Protection Agency, at MSC we've decided to use the more understandable term "reclamation rate".

The reclamation rate, as we define it, is the amount of steel diverted from the waste stream and made into recycled products such as beams and columns (in other words, what I had incorrectly interpreted "recycling rate" to mean).

Overall, the reclamation rate for steel is about 88%—but it's even higher for structural members and plate. According to the Steel Recycling Institute ([www.recycle-steel.org](http://www.recycle-steel.org)) the reclamation rate for structural beams and plates is 95%. (Interestingly, the reclamation rate for rebar is only about 50%, presumably due to the difficulty in separating it from its embedment in concrete.)

What's fascinating to me is the combination of high recycled content with high reclamation rate. While the LEED™ rating system doesn't consider reclamation rates, I believe anyone concerned with the future—and as a parent how can I not be?—must take into consideration what becomes of a material at the end of its useful life.

#### A Fond Farewell; A Warm Welcome

After two years with MSC, Beth Pollak is leaving to participate in a 10-month-long volunteer program in Israel. During her too-brief tenure, Beth has been a great contributor and has written a number of notable articles (my favorite was her coverage of the Student Steel Bridge Competition; see this year's coverage in this issue).

Beth's successor is Hillary Lichtenstein. Hillary is a graduate of DePaul University in Chicago (and of Niles North High School—coincidentally Beth's alma mater) and comes to MSC after a brief stint at a small consumer magazine (*Illinois Now!*). In addition to writing and editing, Hillary will have primary responsibility for article acquisition and for the new products section. She can be reached at 312.670.8316 or at [lichtenstein@modernsteel.com](mailto:lichtenstein@modernsteel.com). She'll also be attending various industry trade shows (including NASCC: The Steel Conference)—so be sure to say hello when you see her!

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