

POP GOES THE CMU

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Ober|Kaler currently represents several general contractors whose projects have been or are being impacted by the supply of contaminated concrete masonry units (CMU). Defective CMU blocks were installed in multiple construction projects in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area and have had varying degrees of impacts on the projects depending on the respective usage of the block.

Multiple investigations determined that the contaminant quick lime (calcium oxide) was accidentally introduced during the production of certain CMU blocks. CMU blocks produced with this contaminant suffered from "pop-outs" or "pock marks" ranging in size from 1/2" to 2" in diameter and 1/8" to 1" deep. The pop-outs were caused by the hydration and expansion of the quick lime within the CMU block. When hydrated, the quick lime expands and exerts pressure on the surrounding components of the CMU. When the quick lime is present near the surface of the CMU block, the expansion results in a pop-out. The size and timing of the pop-out depends on the location and amount of the contaminant in conjunction with its exposure to moisture or other forms of hydration.

Owners and general contractors alike have developed and utilized various strategies to address these defects. The repairs employed are project specific and hinge upon the use of the CMU block as well as the other project considerations and restraints. While the cause of the contaminated CMU blocks has been determined, the ultimate effects and/or repairs remain a serious concern to all project participants impacted by their use.

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