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ERA selects first female chairman



By [CHRIS SWEENEY](#) | Follow Author  

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Jennifer Ford-Smith, director of marketing and single ply product management at Johns Manville, was appointed chairman of the ERA in February.

BETHESDA, Md.—Jennifer Ford-Smith was named chairman of the EPDM Roofing Association in February, making her the first woman to hold the position in the association's 12-year history.

Ford-Smith succeeds John Geary, director of education and industry relations at Firestone Building Products L.L.C., and will be the ERA's fifth different chairman, the association said. She will serve a one-year term.

Her first goal will be more of the same—continue to get the association's message out into the industry.

“We're going to continue to enhance and keep our content relevant on the website,” Ford-Smith said. “We have a list of white papers that we have our technical committee working on. We're actively pursuing to get those into publications.”

Ford-Smith certainly brings strong credentials to the job. She has spent 13 years with Johns Manville, initially joining the firm in 2002 as product manager and eventually being named strategic market manager, a title she said no longer exists.

Part of her job in that role was to identify JM's growth strategy in single-ply, which led to the firm constructing its first manufacturing presence in the single-ply areas—a thermoplastic polyolefin facility at Scottsboro, Ala., in 2008, and its EPDM facility in Milan, Ohio, in 2012.



manville is to commercialize the products that are produced out of Milan.

“We are fortunate to have Jennifer leading our efforts,” Ellen Thorp, associate executive director of ERA, said in a statement. “ERA is playing an increasingly active role in code-setting and regulatory activities, as well as serving as a source of information for the industry about our products. Ford-Smith has the leadership skills and in-depth knowledge of roofing membranes to take us to an even higher level of service to the building industry.”

Ford-Smith said she doesn't expect the white vs. black roofing membrane debate to go away any time soon, but her primary goal to combat it is to continue to advance the curriculum and scientifically backed evidence on the strengths of EPDM and TPO to ensure that the people installing the roof have the ability to make the best decision for the building in question.

“Our goal is to help our members use science to help build credibility around EPDM and help them have a choice,” Ford-Smith said. “That will continue to be our goal. All the manufacturers that are part of ERA offer a breadth of roofing products. We want to give our specifiers, architects and roofers the ability to choose the right roof for the right situation. Our goal is to give them science and support to make that case.”

Regulations regarding volatile organic compounds are another issue Ford-Smith sees the ERA addressing in the near term. States like California have proposed that certain chemicals not be used or drafted regulations that would require lower VOC content, citing one that would potentially drop VOC content down to 100 grams per liter, which she said would be a drastic change.

Most EPDM roofs are installed with adhesives, so any regulations that could cause a drastic change in their production would be of concern to the ERA.

“When you start to change the chemistry that much, then you start to have concerns of how it's going to perform when the contractor is installing it, and this industry likes products that have a proven track record,” Ford-Smith said. “We'll continue to question those organizations, find out what their motivation is and continue to educate them on whether or not that really is the right tree to be barking up.”

Ford-Smith also serves on the advisory council of Women in Roofing, a volunteer organization of the Midwest Roofing Contractors Association that supports women nationally and provides them opportunities in the industry to participate in networking, mentoring and education.

Women in Roofing was launched in November 2014 and Ford-Smith said 130 women were in attendance at the group's initial networking event at the International Roofing Expo in February. She said the goal for the organization is to start rolling out more mentoring and education-focused programs in November.

“I think you're going to see more women taking over businesses as their fathers or mothers retire,” Ford-Smith said.

“If you statistically look at construction jobs, only 9 percent of jobs held in construction are held by women, so that's a small pool,” Ford-Smith said. “I certainly don't see any limitation to what a woman can do in this industry.”



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