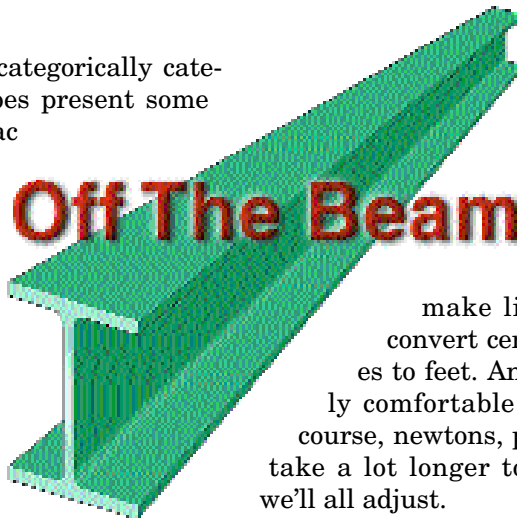


While it's often dangerous to categorically categorize anyone, today's society does present some obvious points of contention: Mac vs. PC; Star Wars fanatics vs. those who prefer A Midsummer's Night Dream; and metric vs. U.S. customary units.

My wife grew up in Canada and lived through that country's complete switchover from miles to kilometers. While she intuitively uses the old system, she doesn't seem to have much problem with metric—whether it's driving speed or temperature. While I tend to approximate (gee, 35 degrees C, that's kinda hot!), she actually does a quick approximation (double the temperature in celsius, subtract the first digit, and add 32—wow, 35 really is hot!). In either case, activities of daily living are not overly effected by whether we buy carrots by the pound or kilogram.

However, for people whose livelihoods depend on precision, the story is different. For a long time, the government has been threatening to mandate a switch to metric; for just as long, everyone has ignored the threat. But for designers and contractors working on certain public projects—and for everyone working outside the U.S.—metric has become a way of life. (Whenever I think about metric conversion, my mind's eye immediately goes to a "Frank & Ernest" comic strip hanging in Keith Grubb's office; in the strip, two bumble bees ask: "Hi, Ms. Inchworm—how's the romance with that



centipede?" To which she forlornly replies: "We broke up. He wanted me to switch to metric.")

Romantic complications aside, in most respects, metric should make life easier. It's a lot easier to convert centimeters to meters than inches to feet. And let's face it—is anyone really comfortable converting feet to miles? Of course, newtons, pascals and joules are going to take a lot longer to get used to, but ultimately we'll all adjust.

In fact, AISC has already started making the adjustment with the just released "LRFD Manual of Steel Construction, Metric Conversion of the 2nd Edition." While clumsy-sounding, this two-volume set should prove a blessing to anyone designing steel structures in metric. Essentially, it's a page-by-page translation of the current manual and should be easily usable by anyone conversant with the standard manual.

Copies of the new Metric Manual (\$132 for the two-volume set; \$72 for individual volumes; AISC-member discounts apply) can be purchased by calling 800/644-2400 or you can visit AISC's website at www.aisc.org.

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