

Cement price headache for homeowners



Construction workers Toby and Lorenzo plaster a wall with a mixture of cement and sand at a construction site along Alexandra Street, Port-of-Spain, yesterday. PHOTO BY LINCOLN HOLDER

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For eight years, a house on Ramdehal Lane, St Augustine, has been under construction.

Yesterday, workers mixed cement in the front yard of the house feverishly, but they admitted to Guardian Media they were not sure how much more work they would get at the site.

The homeowner, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, confirmed that

with the price increase, he was uncertain when next he would purchase cement to continue construction at the site.

When work started on the house, he confirmed that he purchased TCL cement sacks for \$44. The same TCL bag cost him \$74 on Tuesday.

The owner said when work started, the house had an estimated cost of \$700,000, but he has had to pause and restart as a result of rising costs, particularly during the COVID-19 period.

He has purchased material when he could, using his available savings.

This latest price increase is yet another blow to his goal of homeownership and after many years of relying on TCL cement, he may have no choice but to switch to Rock Hard cement due to its cheaper cost.

Other construction sites Guardian Media visited in St Clair and Tunapuna also exclusively used Rock Hard cement.

Low-cost construction company Macon Construction, which had switched to Rock Hard cement since its return last year, said the TCL price increase could raise costs by thousands of dollars.

“Given the consideration (of square footage) and we are able to determine that at 12,000 square feet, it would give an average increase of between \$8,000 to \$10,000 because cement is what makes our reinforced concrete structures viable,” said Christopher Mohammed, a project engineer at Macon.

He explained while there was little difference in quality between the brands, the company had already preferred the imported cement brand due to its ability to quicken the construction process.

“We did our independent testing; the difference is that Rock Hard cement is able to achieve strength in 18 to 19 days versus 21 days for TCL. So, given that consideration, both of them strength-wise are comparable. It is only that Rock Hard cement achieves its strength quicker so therefore you have faster turnover,” he said.

At Darin Bhagwansingh Hardware in Pasea, Tunapuna, the store’s owner admitted many customers were caught off guard by the price increase but ultimately paid the new price.

However, the hardware shop, which currently only has TCL cement for sale, said it would be considering obtaining Rock Hard given its cheaper price point.

Ryan Ramhit, managing director of Rock Hard Cement in Trinidad, confirmed that since the announcement of TCL's price increase on Monday, there had been a marked increase in the company's sales.

"At the end of the day, a lot of (hardwares) are coming back on board solely. So where they would have split the business, they now kind of like Rock Hard more, I should say, than TCL. My sales have increased overall," said Ramhit, who expressed confidence that the company had adequate stock for the increased demand.

"I'm getting a lot more business out of it. So definitely I'm happy for the business. And simply because also I'm able to supply. I have the supply, I have the facility, I have the capability of supplying the entire country and the entire market. So I'm happy for the increase in business overall," he said, adding that he was in the process of hiring 25 more people for the company.

Not all hardwares have adjusted prices just yet, as the Johnny Q Hardware on Ariapita Avenue confirmed it is still selling stock obtained before the February 9 increase at its previous price.

The company said this was because it is only fair to customers, especially given the current state of the economy.

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