

Treated wood designations cause confusion

NEWARK, Del. — If you've looked for pressure treated wood at your local lumberyard lately for a building project, you may have been confused by what's available. The old standbys—creosote and penta treated boards—have generally been replaced by lumber bearing a string of initials.

These initials stand for various chemical salts with long, rather unpronounceable names. Some treatments offer better protection than others, so check to be sure the wood you buy is suited to its intended use.

To help do-it-yourself builders select the right type of treated wood for their projects, University of Delaware extension agricultural engineer Dr. Jim Scarborough has assembled the following information on wood treatments, their effectiveness and availability.

Creosote. This treatment has been around since 1838 and is very effective against termite and decay damage. A black or brownish oil made by distilling coal tar, it has a pungent odor and the fumes are harmful to plants. Since creosote treated wood tastes bad, it is often used on stalls and fences to keep horses from chewing on them.

Direct contact with freshly creosoted lumber can cause skin irritation, though the probability declines as the treatment ages. In addition, freshly treated lumber catches fire easily and produces a dense smoke. But again, this danger lessens with age. Another problem is that you can't paint creosote treated wood because the oils bleed out.

With all these problems, why use it? "Because it does its job very well," says Scarborough. "If it didn't, power companies and railroads wouldn't use it. But these drawbacks do make it a less than ideal building material, and creosote treated lumber generally is no longer available at lumber yards. So, if you yearn for the smell of creosote in your new barn, your best bet is to contact the local

power company and find out what they do with their old poles."

Penta or pentachlorophenol was first used in the 1930s and came into extensive use after 1950. This treatment consists of a heavy or light oil containing 5 percent penta. The heavy oils preserve better but don't take paint; the light ones are paintable and so are generally used. According to Scarborough, penta is less toxic to plants than creosote, but may damage plastic films which come in contact with it. Keep this in mind if you're building a plastic covered greenhouse.

"There's some indication that lumber freshly treated with penta may present a health hazard to livestock through foodstuffs which come in contact with the chemical," the specialist cautions. During 1976-77 in Michigan, eight dairy herds were quarantined after penta was identified in tissue cultures. The penta was thought to be contaminated with dioxin. However, no other reports of penta related animal illness are on record.

"To be on the safe side," Scarborough says, "don't use penta treated lumber for feed bunks, hay racks or other structures in which feed comes in contact with the treated wood. But I wouldn't shy away from it for regular building construction if you can find it. That may be difficult since many lumberyards no longer stock it."

Now for the salt preservatives, or alphabet soup. These preservatives are salt compounds of several chemicals. And since the names are so long, they're identified by initials: ACA (Ammoniacal Copper Arsenate), CCA (Chromated Copper Arsenate), ACC (Acid Copper Chromate and FCAP (Fluor Chrome Arsenate Phenol).

In these preservatives, water, ammonia or acid is the carrier. After treatment the carrier evaporates, leaving the salts to protect the wood. Lumber preserved in this way is relatively

clean, odorless and suitable for painting. It's nontoxic to plants and considered safe when in contact with feed. It also is what's generally available at the lumberyard. In some cases these preservatives are identified by trade names rather than initials — Greensalt, Koppers (CCA), Wolmanac (CCA) or Woodlast (CCA), to name just a few.

According to Scarborough, most lumberyards now carry wood treated with 0.4 pcf (pounds per cubic foot) CCA, which is only suitable for above ground or non-soil contact use. The service life of this amount of CCA for in-ground use has not yet been determined, but test stakes treated with less than 0.6 pcf CCA or ACA do not last well in soil. In tests conducted in Mississippi, 10 percent of the stakes treated with 0.44 pcf had termite damage after 25 years.

The following table summarizes the amounts of various preservatives recommended by the American Wood Preservers Association for different uses. The letters NR indicate the material is not recommended. All values are in pcf.

Use	Creosote	Penta	ACC	ACA	CCA
Fence Posts	6.0-7.0	0.30	0.50	0.40	0.40
Structural Posts	12.0	0.60	NR	0.60	0.60
Lumber:					
Ground contact	10.0	0.50	0.62	0.40	0.40
Not in soil contact	8.0	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
Plywood:					
Ground contact	10.0	0.5	0.62	0.40	0.40
Not in soil contact	8.0	0.4	0.25	0.25	0.25
Foundations	NR	NR	NR	0.60	0.60
Greenhouses:					
Above contact	NR	NR	NR	0.40	0.40
Above ground	NR	NR	NR	0.25	0.25

Don't be surprised if you have to ask a lumberyard to special order the correct amount of preservative in treated lumber," concludes Scarborough. "And don't be dissuaded by sales people who try to sell you what's in stock instead. Remember, now you probably know more about the wood you need than they do."

On February 1, 1985, the Environmental Protection Agency will restrict the sale of creosote, penta and arsenic compounds to certified applicators. The University of Delaware Cooperative Extension Service will offer a course this fall to professional carpenters, farmers and do-it-yourselfers for certification in the use of these wood preservatives. Times and locations will be announced as they become available.

Septage conference planned


NEW CUMBERLAND — The Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, Pennsylvania Portable Sanitation Ass'n, and The Pennsylvania Liquid Waste Haulers Ass'n. will jointly sponsor a Septage Management Conference March 28-30, 1985 at the Sheraton-Harrisburg Inn, New Cumberland.

The program is being planned to provide information on the most appropriate technology for septage treatment and disposal; liability and workman's compensation insurance for septage haulers; and the role of Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources and municipalities in treating and disposing of septage.

Manufacturers and distributors of equipment relating to septage management and portable toilets will be invited to set up exhibits of their wares.

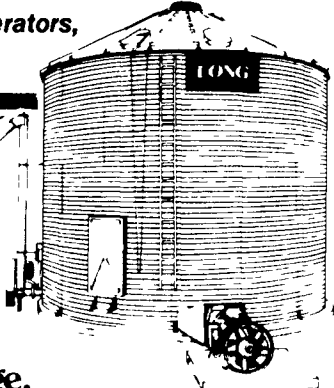
All haulers of sewage wastes, Sewage Treatment plant managers, and engineers and

consultants, and public officials are invited to attend. A copy of the proposed agenda and information on renting exhibit space can be obtained by contacting - Joseph A. Macialek, Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, Room 5, 200 Adams Ave., Scranton, Pa. 18503.



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