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Maintenance of CCA Treated Timber Structures

Following the release of the report from the APVMA (Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority) on CCA there have been a number of enquiries on what to do with CCA treated timber in public areas.

Outdoor Structures Australia believes there are two issues involved:

1. How should exterior timber be maintained irrespective of the treatment?
2. How can public perception over CCA treated timber be minimized without having to replace existing structures?

1. Normal Timber Maintenance.

Weather exposure leads to premature degradation of the timber surfaces, whether it is through UV effects or water absorption. Checking, cracking, delaminating, discoloration, twisting and bowing can be minimized by caring for your timber structure. After initial construction of timber structures it has been recognized that maintenance is seldom carried out often due to the difficulty and cost of surface finish reapplication. This need not be the case.

Wise asset management dictates that timber infrastructure should be regularly maintained with a simple effective maintenance program regardless of the treatment employed. This maintenance has been shown to significantly improve the life and quality of an exterior timber structures. This program should include the simplest preparation and reapplication techniques. Preparation can be an unnecessarily costly component of a maintenance program and application should be able to be performed quickly by unskilled labour.

Tanacoat has been developed as a maintenance system for weather exposed timber structures. Tanacoat is an oil-based, semi-transparent, water repellent, penetrating sealer.

2. Minimizing CCA perception.

Some are so concerned about their existing CCA structures that they are considering removing them from service while others are looking for a suitable timber finish. The APVMA is not recommending the removal of existing CCA timber structures and has issued the following statement on painting. The full report on both can be found at: <http://www.apvma.gov.au/chemrev/arsenic.shtml>

Will painting arsenic treated timber reduce the risk of arsenic leaching to the surface?

Information is limited on the possible benefits of painting treated-timber (including existing structures) to reduce possible risks. Some scientific studies indicate that certain penetrating coatings, such as oil-based semi-transparent stains, when used on a regular basis may reduce the potential for CCA

exposure. However, there have been some questions raised about the effectiveness of film-forming or non-penetrating stains because of cracking, peeling and flaking.

As such, the APVMA cannot provide any definitive advice at this time on whether there are benefits from painting.

The USEPA is currently investigating the effectiveness of painting CCA-treated timber structures. Based on the first-year results from two-year studies initiated, the Agency is providing updated information on the effectiveness of sealants and stains in reducing potential exposure to arsenic from CCA-treated timber structures.

***Further information on this issue can be found on the USEPA website:
<http://www.epa.gov/loppad001/reregistration/ccal#sealants>***

The observant reader will have noticed that no clear direction is actually given. Until further advice is given by the APVMA or the USEPA we can only suggest that sound timber maintenance practice be followed as outlined in point 1 Normal Timber Maintenance.

Sincerely,

Ted Stubbersfield
Director