

REPORTER

MANUFACTURERS TO USE NEW WOOD PRESERVATIVES, REPLACING MOST RESIDENTIAL USES OF CCA

News from the United States Environmental Protection Agency

On February 12, 2002, EPA announced a voluntary decision by industry to move consumer use of treated lumber products away from a variety of pressure-treated wood that contains arsenic by December 31, 2003, in favor of new alternative wood preservatives. This transition affects virtually all residential uses of wood treated with chromated copper arsenate, also known as CCA, including wood used in play-structures, decks, picnic tables, landscaping timbers, residential fencing, patios and walkways/boardwalks.

As of January 1, 2004, EPA will not allow CCA products to be used to treat wood intended for any of these residential uses. This decision will facilitate the voluntary transition to new alternative wood preservatives that do not contain arsenic in both the manufacturing and retail sectors. Although the Agency has not concluded that there is unreasonable risk to the public from these products, we do believe that any reduction in exposure to arsenic is desirable. This action comes years ahead of completing the Agency's regulatory and scientific assessment of CCA and will result in substantial reductions in potential exposure to CCA.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS REGARDING THE CCA TRANSITION PROCESS

What uses of CCA-treated wood are affected by this transition?

After December 31, 2003, wood treaters will no longer be able to use CCA to treat wood intended for use in decks, picnic tables, landscaping timbers, gazebos, residential fencing, patios, walkways/boardwalks, and play-structures. Wood treated prior to this date,

however, can still be used in residential settings. Already built structures containing CCA-treated wood are not affected by this action.

Does CCA-treated wood present any health risks to me or my family?

EPA has not concluded that CCA-treated wood poses any unreasonable risk to the public or the environment. Nevertheless, arsenic is a known human carcinogen and, thus, the Agency believes that any reduction in the levels of potential exposure to arsenic is desirable. EPA believes that the voluntary transition to non-arsenical containing wood preservatives for residential sites is a responsible action by the registrants.

What steps can parents take to reduce their family's potential exposure to CCA?

As a responsible parent, you manage a wide range of risks in your child's environment. Here are some common sense tips for minimizing unnecessary exposure to CCA:

- Treated wood should never be burned in open fires, stoves, fireplaces, or residential boilers.
- Always wash hands thoroughly after contact with any wood, especially prior to eating and drinking.
- Food should not come into direct contact with any treated wood.
- Always follow the precautions outlined in EPA's Consumer Safety Information Sheet before working with CCA-treated wood.

Additional measures that may be taken include the following:

- Apply a coating product to pressure-treated wood on a regular basis. Some studies suggest that this can reduce the amount of CCA that leaches from treated wood. (See the “coating” question.)
- When conducting new construction or repairs, consider the range of alternatives to CCA-treated wood.

These alternatives include both non-arsenical chemical wood preservatives, as well as other wood and non-wood. Consult your local home improvement store for more information about available alternatives.

Should I replace my CCA-treated deck or play-set?

EPA does not recommend that consumers replace or remove existing structures made with CCA-treated wood or the soil surrounding those structures. Concerned citizens may want to take extra precautions, however, by applying a coating to exposed surfaces on a regular basis.

What types of coatings are most effective?

While available data are very limited, some studies suggest that applying certain penetrating coatings (e.g., oil-based, semi-transparent stains) on a regular basis (e.g., once per year or every other year depending upon wear and weathering) may reduce the migration of wood preservative chemicals from CCA-treated wood. In selecting a finish, consumers should be aware that, in some cases, “film-forming” or non-penetrating stains (e.g., latex semitransparent, latex opaque, and oil-based opaque stains) on outdoor surfaces such as decks and fences are not recommended, as subsequent peeling and flaking may ultimately have an impact on durability as well as exposure to the preservatives in the wood. Talk with your local hardware store about available coatings.

How can I tell if my deck has been constructed with CCA-treated wood?

Freshly treated wood, if not coated, has a greenish tint, which fades over time. As a practical matter, CCA has been the principal chemical used to treat wood for decks and other outdoor uses around the home. Generally, if your deck has not been constructed with

redwood or cedar, then most likely the deck was constructed with CCA-treated wood. Alternatively, if you know who constructed the deck, you may want to call and ask.

What alternatives to CCA-treated wood will be available?

A number of preservatives have been registered by EPA, and wood treated with these preservatives are expected to be available in the marketplace. In addition, untreated wood (e.g., cedar and redwood) and nonwood alternatives, such as plastics, metal, and composite materials are available. Your local hardware store or lumberyard can provide more information about available alternatives.

How will the voluntary transition away from CCA affect the Agency's risk assessment for residential use of CCA-treated wood?

Throughout this process we have continued working on our risk assessment and the Agency is continuing to proceed with a risk assessment. Through our risk assessment process to date, we have received extensive recommendations from the Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP), a group of scientific experts, on the best approach to evaluating potential risks to children from exposure to decks and play-structures. Visit the SAP Report for more information. We have also received many comments from the public, stakeholders, industry, and public interest groups and we will review these comments as we determine the next steps. ■

This article can be found on the EPA's Web site at: www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizens/cca_qa.htm

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