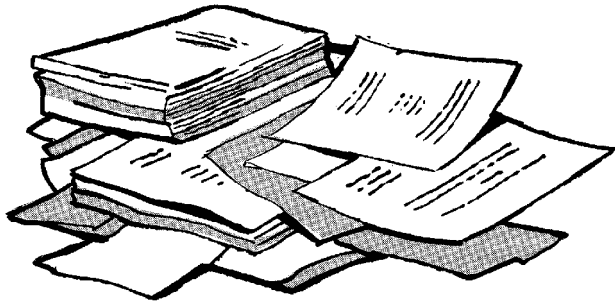


Letters



Kudos for Lotz

To the Editor:

Over several years of reading your fine publication, I have found Bill Lotz's articles on moisture problems to be among the most informative and helpful. I have seen houses with wet insulation, and moldy sheetrock nails and ceilings where the proper application of a poly vapor barrier during construction would have prevented costly repairs. Bill's considerable experience in this area and in other facets of construction, contribute to making your journal one of the best of its kind.

Bill Moore
Cadwell & Moore
Design/Contracting
Middlebury, Vt.

Location, Location, Location

To the Editor:

Your journal is an interesting and excellent educational publication. Our company performs building inspections and we find your articles directly applicable on a daily basis. Our experience differs in some cases (i.e., moisture problems), however, and I suspect this is largely due to climate differences. Therefore, we would like to request that the location of the properties be included in the articles.

H.D. Vander Schaaf
Associated Building Analysts
Ballwin, Mo.

You make an excellent point. Many environmental factors affect moisture problems: The average winter temperature, length of winter, the indoor and outdoor humidity levels, and the drying potential during the summer (how hot and dry is it?) are all important. The side of the house (north versus south) can also mean the difference between a serious moisture problem and none at all. Lifestyle issues are also critical: Do the homeowners water 100 house plants and boil spaghetti twice a day? And do they keep a couple of rooms cool to save energy (but raise mushrooms)? We do our best to provide as much background to these problems as we

can. Only with all this information can we hope to understand the cause and solution to a building moisture problem.—Editor

Thumbs Down on Computers

To the Editor:

I was unhappy with the computer issue. I don't have one. I'm sure they work for some people, but not for me. Please don't continue this mode. Let's stay with tapes and rulers and the simple facts of building.

When the day comes that the first computer-built house rolls out of a small factory somewhere in U.S., I'll put down my belt and hammer.

Keep up the great work.

Fritz
Bangor, Me.

Epoxy Sources

To the Editor:

The article "Restoring Historic Windows" (NEB 6/87), mentions a "medium-viscosity resin epoxy," which apparently reconstitutes rotten wood. I've been unable to locate such a product and wondered if you could give some sources.

Robert Hansman
Windsor, Conn.

There are two different types of epoxies used for repairing wood: consolidants and fillers.

If you want to strengthen wood that's weak and pulpy from rot, you need to saturate the wood fibers with a consolidant or "loose" epoxy. A product called Git-Rot (Boatlife, 205 Sweet Hollow Rd., Old Bethpage, NY 11804 516/454-0055) works well for this, and is available at most boating supply stores.

If you need to fill a gap or hole, you should use a filler or "medium-viscosity epoxy." A good source for this as well as for the consolidant-type epoxy is Abatron, Inc. (33 Center Drive, Gilberts, IL 60136 312/426-2200).

In many cases you will need to first consolidate the wood, then fill it. Large gaps or missing sections will need wood patches as well.—Author Stivale

OPINION

Pressure Treated Dangers Still a Secret

More than a year has passed since the pressure-treated wood industry agreed that it was a good idea to warn people about the wonderful chemicals used to make their wood last so long.

But many people aren't getting the word.

Take Chris Knode. He just bought a bunch of green-tinted pressure-treated wood from his local lumber supplier without so much as a hint that there is anything dangerous about it.

Although, now Chris knows pressure-treated wood is not a good substitute for mesquite in the family barbecue.

He learned that lesson the hard way about three years ago after building 1,500 feet of decking around his western Massachusetts house.

Yes, Chris stoked his outdoor barbecue with a generous supply of the greenish lumber scraps to cook some hamburgers and fish for his family and friends.

He suspected something was amiss when the usually delicious burgers tasted awful.

Later that evening, Knode, the only member of the party who forced down the bad-tasting chow, felt pretty ill, which is no surprise considering what was in the burning wood and the smoke that inundated the sizzling meat.

That green-tinted lumber was soaked in an inorganic arsenical. As the name says, it contained a form of arsenic. Remember the Pied Piper of Hamelin who got rid of rats with a magic flute? Arsenic is the modern version of a magic flute, but it's better. A tone-deaf rat might walk away from the flute but give him arsenic and it's a one-way ticket to rodent heaven.

Studies have shown that consuming even a tiny bit of inorganic arsenicals increases the risk of getting cancer.

While I never used pressure-treated wood as a cooking fuel, I can understand how Chris made that error.

In the late 1970s, I had the dubious pleasure of working as a farmer in South Florida. Florida state building code requires that any wood that touches concrete or the ground must be treated. And since most Florida houses are constructed on concrete slabs with cinder block walls, there is a lot of pressure-treated lumber around most construction sites.

I don't think a day went by that I didn't cut, carry, or otherwise handle pressure-treated wood.

Sometimes the wood in the middle of large banded packages was oily and wet.

And while I didn't cook with it, I wasn't aware it would be smart to wash my hands before eating lunch or to avoid sitting on a stack of pressure-treated wood while consuming the sandwich du jour from the ever-present roach coach.

And no one ever slowed-down our production schedule to find the official pressure-treated wood cleaning rag to wipe the residue from the oily boards.

On cold winter mornings (yes, it gets cold in Florida during the winter) more than a piece or two of pressure-treated scrap wood found its way into the barrel of burning wood we generally lit for a little warmth during the morning coffee break.

Nobody thought anything of the residue or washing hands or not burning it because nobody ever told us we should take some extra safety precautions with this lumber.

Well, people are supposed to be told now.

The pressure-treated wood industry "volunteered" to start a consumer awareness program in a settlement with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) after the federal agency threatened to make health warnings mandatory.

But the system is flawed, and as usual, none of the principal players are to blame.

Producers of pressure-treated wood send the consumer information sheets to lumber retailers, who are instructed to hand them out to anyone purchasing the wood.

Retailers, however, were not part of the deal with the EPA, so they are under no obligation to hand them out. So when retailers don't hand them out, producers can throw up their hands and shrug. "It's not our fault," they exclaim.

And the EPA isn't in the clear either.

To test the effectiveness of the program, the feds let the industry hire a company outside the pressure-treated wood industry to do a survey to find out how the "awareness" program was going.

The recent survey showed that 70 percent of retailers are cooperating with the program, but what it did not show is how many consumers are actually receiving the information aimed at them.

Even industry people admit that many lumberyards are storing the warning sheets on the shelf.

And while I'm sure the audit of the awareness program conformed to accepted standards for such things, it did not exactly check out an exhaustive sample in this area.

In New England, for instance, only six lumberyards were actually visited, which included no sites in either New Hampshire or Vermont.

In the entire state of New York, only two sites were visited and one of them was a treatment facility.

This is where the EPA dropped the ball. If the feds believe that educating the public about pressure-treated wood is the best way to ensure safe handling, then they should make sure people are being educated.

I can hear the rumblings that the sheets and warnings are not that big of a deal. After all, careful treatment of hazardous chemicals is just good common sense.

But I have never found good sense to be particularly common.

And if you don't get the warning, how will you learn that the chemicals are hazardous in the first place?

By osmosis, I guess. ■

by Lewis Lorini, associated editor of Woodshop News. This article first appeared in the August 1987 issue of Woodshop News, published in Essex, Conn.