TIMBER PROTECTION

Keep the Timber Customer Satisfied

WOOD PROTECTION ASSOCIATION (WPA) DIRECTOR STEVE YOUNG, POINTS OUT THAT REASSURING DESIGNERS AND ENGINEERS ABOUT THE ABILITY OF QUALITY TREATED WOOD TO PERFORM AND PROVIDING INFORMATION TO ENSURE IT IS CORRECTLY SPECIFIED, TREATED AND INSTALLED ARE KEY PRIORITIES.

The WPA has always believed that making the most of wood goes hand in glove with making the most of wood protection technology. Collaborative market research by the WPA and the Timber Trade Federation (TTF) in 2017 indicated clearly that buyer confidence in the ability of treated wood to perform and knowledge about standards of treatment are the principal factors affecting demand and rotating the potential for growth.

There is no quick-fix to changing buyer perceptions on quality and improving supply chain knowledge. Whilst other major markets for treated wood like North America, the Nordic countries and France introduced an industry-wide quality scheme for treated wood many years ago, wood treaters have, save for a few exceptions, been reluctant to adopt similar third-party quality schemes here in the UK. It is vital that third-party verification of treated wood quality and performance is adopted more widely across the UK. A failure to do so will inevitably mean that wood will lose-out to alternative, man-made materials.

BRE Field Trial
Well over 1,500 softwood fence posts were installed in 2015 as part of a field trial commissioned by the WPA to assess the durability performance of pre-treated wood in ground contact. Three years later and the first major inspection of these posts is underway. This field trial is the biggest scientific appraisal of treated wood in ground contact ever undertaken in the UK and the outcomes will help inform treatment standards and specifications in the future. For now though the WPA's immediate priorities continue to focus on the means to build buyer confidence in wood treatment quality and improving supply chain knowledge about how to specify treated wood correctly. It's reassuring to know that major organisations like TTF, Confor and LADC (Local Authority Building Control Association) are in conversation with WPA on tackling these important matters.
The field trial is one of three key elements in the WPA's strategy to provide wood treated with a credible and relevant means to respond to concerns about the quality and performance. The three elements are:

- A national quality assurance scheme – WPA Benchmark – that provides independent verification that a specific commodity like a fence post has been treated correctly in line with the British Standard for treated wood (BS8417) for its application and desired service life.
- An approval scheme for the wood preservatives used to independently confirm the minimum level of that preservative required to be effective. The WPA is currently considering an expansion of this quality scheme to include a nominated treater scheme and a performance warranty.
- The EME managed WPA Field Trial involves over 1,500 UK-sourced pine, spruce, larch and Douglas fir fence posts installed across four test sites with differing soil conditions – one in Scotland and one at EME Welford. The year three inspection of all the posts is currently underway.

Material health, indoor air quality and healthy buildings are a growing priority for major construction companies and housebuilders. The need for the producers of building materials to take material health and indoor air quality seriously was highlighted by a number of guest speakers at the WPA conference in 2017. EME was subsequently commissioned by WPA to review current published scientific papers and data and identify any obvious gaps in information that needed to be filled by further work.

The initial report was submitted to WPA at the end of 2017 and identified a number of very positive conclusions about treated wood. EME has now been asked to draw these together into a form that will help defend our industry from uncontrolled claims that the mere presence of chemical treated wood must harm indoor air quality. Delegates at the WPA Making the Most of Wood Conference on 12 April were the first to hear the headlines about treated wood and indoor air quality from EME's sustainable materials lead, Ed Sutcliffe.

For more information visit: www.wood-protection.org.

Image: 01 02: Treatments such as the low pressure, chemic vacuum preservation treatments from Lumac protect construction and joins timber against decay and wood attacks. Courtesy EME