

## 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.

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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 retarding 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 treating 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 LABC (Local Authority Building Control Association) are in conversation with WPA on tackling these important matters.

## TIMBER PROTECTION



The field trial is one of three key elements in the WPA's strategy to provide wood treaters 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 BRE managed WPA Field Trial<sup>1</sup> involves over 1,500 UK sourced pine, spruce, larch and Douglas fir fence posts installed across two test sites with differing soil conditions – one in Scotland and one at BRE Watford. 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. BRE 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. BRE has now been asked to draw these together into a form that will help defend our industry from unfounded 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 BRE's sustainable materials lead, Ed Suttie.

### WPA BENCHMARK

The WPA Benchmark quality scheme operated by the WPA provides third-party certification that an individual product like a fence post or structural timber has been treated correctly to deliver a service life performance as defined in the British Standard for wood preservation BS 8417 – 15, 30 or 60 years. For timber used in ground contact applications the WPA operates a scheme for wood preservatives that independently advises treaters on the minimum retention approved by the WPA that should be used. Later this year the WPA anticipates that it will be expanding the scope of the WPA Benchmark quality scheme to include a nominated treaters scheme and a national 15-year performance warranty for an individual wood product impregnated with a WPA approved preservative.



For more information visit:  
[www.wood-protection.org](http://www.wood-protection.org)

**IMAGE:**  
01-02: Treatments such as the low pressure, double vacuum preservative treatments from Lanza protect construction and joinery timbers against decay and insect attack. Courtesy Lanza