The Wood Protection Association (WPA) has just commissioned Britain’s largest ever durability trial of home grown timber. This information sheet describes why this field trial is so important to the UK timber industry and why those with an interest in growing the use of British softwoods are giving this WPA project their backing.

WPA has contracted Building Research Establishment (BRE) to conduct a long term controlled field trial of sawn and pressure treated British Softwood posts at two sites with differing soil conditions – one in Scotland and one in England. In all, some 1,560 samples of treated and untreated spruce, pine, Douglas fir and larch posts will be installed across the two sites.

Influencing BS8417
In 2013, BSI accepted WPA recommendations to increase the penetration depth required in the BS8417 30 year specification for ground contact (Use Class 4) treated wood. A growing awareness about variability in the natural durability of heartwood, particularly in fast-grown plantation softwoods, contributed to this specification change.

Field Trial to assess the durability of British Softwoods
Spruce – pine – Douglas fir - larch

Any process that results in achieving the new heartwood penetration requirement may be used but, as in other parts of the world, it is expected that incising prior to treatment may be the only practical method currently available for commercial use – particularly for species that are difficult to treat.

The WPA believe that strengthening the 15 year specification should only be based on data derived from a controlled field trial of commercially sized sawn posts of spruce, pine, Douglas fir and larch from UK forests. To provide this data the WPA Field Trial will include batches of posts that are:

- untreated;
- treated to current BS8417 Use Class 4 retentions and with some sample batches treated to higher retentions;
- Incised and treated to BS8417 Use Class 4 retentions.

This project uses commercially available incising patterns, independently audited and assessed.

In all there will be approximately 1400 75 x 75mm treated samples (600 incised) and 160 untreated controls in the field trial, across both sites. In addition, the project will also include some smaller EN2521 samples to characterise the test sites against other UK test site locations. This is a low cost addition that will provide some very useful additional data. The project will run for up to 15 years.

The wood preservatives used in this field trial have all been approved by the WPA after independent scrutiny of efficacy data under our Benchmark Product Approval scheme. The preservative loadings used in preparing samples will be those approved by WPA and audited by BRE.

This project is not intended to be a comparative assessment of the different preservative systems used and the performance data on each system will only be available to the supplier of that system.

All test sample post preparation, quality control and project logistics and management will be carried out by WPA, in partnership with key commercial organisations who have an interest in the market for British Softwoods. The key role of auditing these activities, the establishment and monitoring of the two test sites, and annual reporting on the condition of test stakes, will be the responsibility of BRE.

1 Field Test method for determining effectiveness of wood preservative in ground contact.
Further information

For further information on this key research project or to enquire about becoming a project sponsor, please contact the Wood Protection Association on info@wood-protection.org.

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