Safe Handling of Treated Wood Products

Introduction

Preservative and other chemical treatments are often used to extend the serviceability and durability of many timber and wood products. In a great majority of cases these treatments present minimal if any significant risk to those handling the treated wood products in normal, expected circumstances. However, as with handling and working with many materials, certain hazards may be presented and should be avoided or minimised. This guide is intended to provide general advice to owners and users working with the main types of treated wood in normal residential, construction and industrial situations.

Understanding what treatments are in the wood

In Australia and New Zealand, treated wood and timber products should bear a treatment brand that conveys important information about what chemical the wood product is treated with, and the end use that the product is suitable for. The treatment brand will have the following form:

**Treatment Branding (example only)**

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999 01 H4
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- **Plant or producer number**
- **Preservative or chemical number**
- **Treatment or hazard level**

The plant or producer number identifies the specific facility where the wood product was treated. Details of the plant indicated by the number can be obtained from the Timber Preservation Council in New Zealand or the Timber Preservers Association in Australia. The treatment brand may appear as an ink stamp on the timber faces or as a label or stamp on the ends of the treated wood.

The preservative or chemical number, similar to an ingredient number on food labeling, identifies the preservative type used to treat the particular wood product. These numbers with the associated preservatives are listed in NZS3640 and AS1604 series. The preservatives numbers most likely to be encountered in Australia and New Zealand are as follows, on the next page.

Examples of different treatment brands – at the top a typical ink or burn brand on the end grain of a board and on the bottom a face or side ink brand typically used on LVL and structural timber.
If additional information is required, users should ask for details from the merchant or wholesale supplier of the treated wood products, or follow up with the manufacturer using the producer number and other stamps or details that may be visible on the wood products.

Working with treated wood products

This discussion pertains to handling and working with preservative treated wood products as available on the trade or retail market in normal circumstances for construction and other wood utilisation. Operators in wood treating and processing plants experience different conditions and risks due to possible exposure to preservatives chemicals and wood immediately after treatment processing before fixation or drying of the preservatives.

As a manufactured article, treated wood does not strictly require a safety data sheet (SDS) to be supplied in most circumstances.

However, most producers or retailers can provide a pro forma SDS or a safe handling guide for their treated wood products on request.

Consult with the retail supplier or manufacturer of the wood products.

Treated wood products are safe to use with appropriate common sense precautions. Handling of any wood product including treated wood may present certain hazards.

Therefore the following precautions are recommended when working with and disposing of the material. Most of these recommendations are just as applicable to handling untreated wood products.

- Use only treated wood products that are dry and clean.
- Avoid inhalation of wood dust during any operation where airborne residues may be generated such as high speed machining, cutting and sanding. Use a dust mask or preferably air extraction to ensure that airborne wood dust levels are below recommended exposure limits.
- Keep the work area clean and do not allow wood dust and residues to accumulate.
- Brush sawdust off skin and clothes.
- When using power saws or machining, wear safety glasses or goggles to protect the eyes from flying particles.
- Where practical, wearing of light work gloves is recommended while handling treated wood products to protect against splinters and minor abrasions.
- Wash hands after working with treated timber and before eating, drinking and smoking.
- Dispose of treated timber offcuts, waste pieces and shavings with appropriate waste disposal services in compliance with local regulations.
- Do not burn treated wood wastes, off-cuts and redundant pieces for home heating or cooking fuel, or as a means of disposal. Burning may produce toxic fumes and residues. The ash and residues from burning treated wood may be toxic to fish and wildlife.
Workers in a truss and frame factory or similar handling treated wood continuously should take additional care.

Additional notes and considerations

**Frequency of Exposure:**
It is to be expected that individuals handling treated wood frequently and regularly such as in a truss and frame factory or other industrial and commercial situations may have a higher level of exposure to all risk factors compared to occasional or infrequent users. It is recommended that industrial users take greater care to avoid exposure. If any adverse reactions are suspected from handling treated wood, consult with the on-site health and safety representative or manager.

**Creosote:** Creosote (preservative number 20) treated wood may be irritating and cause burns or rashes from contact with the treated wood. Wear impervious gloves and full length clothing to prevent direct skin contact with creosote treated wood. Creosote can increase the sensitivity of skin to sunburn from ultraviolet light.

Wear high SPF UV barrier cream on all exposed skin when working outdoors with creosote treated wood.

**Solvents:** Light Organic Solvent Preservative (LOSP) treated wood (mainly preservative number 64) may have a residual solvent odour particularly during cutting and similar operations. The level of residual solvent is unlikely to pose any hazard but the odour may be of nuisance value. Good ventilation is recommended in these cases, or selection of a low odour solvent treated alternative.

**Dyes and pigments:** Treated framing timber products are often coloured with dyes or pigments for easy identification. The most common examples are pink or red for H1.2 boron treatment in New Zealand, and in Australia blue for H2 envelope treatment. In some cases there may be some colour rub-off on clothes and skin from these colouring additives. These exposures are not hazardous but may be of nuisance value. Wash any stain off skin with soap and water.

Creosote treated wood can have a soiling surface and may cause irritation or sunburn with contact on unprotected skin.

Red coloured H1.2 treated framing as typically used in New Zealand as above. Blue coloured H2-F treated framing as used in southern Australia as below.
**Disclaimer**

Lonza does not manufacture treated wood products. Treated wood products are manufactured by many independent producers throughout New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere and may incorporate wood preservative constituents supplied to the wood producers by Lonza and other parties. Specific guidance and safe handling recommendations for any particular treated wood product should be confirmed by the manufacturer or supplier of the wood product. This information is provided in good faith for general guidance in handling treated wood products and is believed to be accurate and represent good industry practice. However no warranty is made, either express or implied, as to the suitability of these recommendations for any particular circumstance or the results to be obtained from the use of such information. Any user must make their own determination and satisfy themselves that the information and recommendations given by Lonza herein or its affiliates are (i) suitable for intended process and purpose and (ii) in compliance with environmental, health and safety regulations. Lonza reserves the right to delete, amend or add to any of the details or recommendations contained in this document at any time in light of additional information and experience. © Lonza Wood Protection September 2016

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**Mould:** Treated wood products may become infected with surface mould in damp conditions, or if packs become rain wet during storage. Surface moulds while unsightly do not structurally degrade wood.

If working with mould infected wood it is recommended to clean the wood with a household bleach or strong cleaning agent in a water solution rather than dry brushing which can create dust. Avoid handling or processing mould infected wood in a manner that generates airborne dust. Wear a filter mask if dust is generated when handling mould infected wood. While of low risk for normal healthy individuals, mould spores may be irritating if inhaled, particularly for individuals who have existing respiratory disease, weakened immune system or heightened allergic responses.

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**Care should be taken to avoid breathing dust from mould infected timber**

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**New Zealand**

Tel: +64 9 276 3646  
Email: tanalised.nz@lonza.com  
www.lonza.com

**Zelam**

Tel: +64 6 755 9234  
Email: scott.connor@lonza.com  
www.zelam.com

**Australia**

Tel: +61 3 9339 8915  
Email: tanalised.au@lonza.com  
www.lonza.com