
Scientists Endorse CCA Treated Wood as Environmentally Responsible

An independent consumer education consortium whose board is comprised of 250 physicians, scientists and policy advisors, has published a report supporting the use of treated wood as a safe and environmentally responsible choice for outdoor building purposes.

The report conducted by the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH), focused on wood treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA), which is commonly used for utility poles, marinas, wood foundations, highway construction and other outdoor applications where wood is exposed to rot, insect attack and other forms of biodegradation. The report found "Pressure treated wood is a relatively strong and long lasting material that maintains its integrity in conditions under which untreated wood would quickly degrade."

The report indicated the most common source of consumer concern appears to be centered on the arsenic component of CCA, although environmentalists have also questioned the potential effect of the copper on marine life. Citing several well conducted and conclusive studies, including one in 1990 by a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the ACSH report found nothing to justify either concern. "CCA pressure treated wood is not classified as hazardous because CCA fixes to the wood in a way that makes the chemical highly insoluble and leach resistant," the report states.

Arsenic is a Normal Constituent of Food

Dr. Henry A. Schroeder, M.D. Emeritus Professor of Physiology at Dartmouth Medical School, believes arsenic doesn't deserve such a bad rap. "All living things are exposed to natural arsenic and have been since life began . . . it is a normal constituent of food and may perform some unknown physiological function."

The ACSH report further noted that because treating wood allows it to last 10 to 20 times longer than untreated wood, the use of it is, in fact, environmentally responsible in that it conserves trees. "CCA-treated wood is made from a renewable resource grown almost entirely on managed timberland . . . requires less energy to produce . . . and is relatively economical", stated the report. "When compared with the effects of alternate building products, the negative effects of CCA treated wood are minimal."