

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING by R. de Lissa

CANADIAN WOOD PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

Ladies and gentleman, it gives me very great pleasure to welcome you all here today to this, our fifth annual meeting, of the Canadian Wood Preservation Association.

For those of you who may be unfamiliar with CWPA, I should explain that we formed this organization six years ago in Vancouver, to provide a national forum for the exchange of technical information, to all with an active interest in wood - protection.

Our membership is unrestricted and consists of people involved in all aspects of the business of extending wood's service life; our members are made up of treaters, specifiers, researchers and marketers, who are involved in the pressure treatment of wood, sap-stain and mould prevention, coatings protection and the remedial treatment of wood in-situ.

A number of our most supportive members are from countries as far afield as Sweden, Norway, England and Australia. We also have good representation from the USA and, in case you were wondering, we also have a very strong contingent from Canada.

You will see on our program that we are featuring two presentations on matters of environmental concern to our industry. Three years ago our members, when asked to respond to a questionnaire, voted this subject a number one priority; and since then we have sought regular submissions and encouraged useful dialogue with key representatives from Agriculture Canada and the Environmental Protection Service.

I am sure that few of us would disagree that this subject is, and, will continue to be a most dominant issue for all who earn their livelihood directly, or indirectly from the treatment and sale of preserved wood products.

At no time in mankind's history has there been such a global awareness and concern about the impact of industry on the environment as there exists today.

The wood preservation industry in Canada is no exception, and continues to be under close surveillance by regulatory agencies, the media and the public, twenty four hours a day ---- never before have so many in the industry been watched so closely by so many outside of it. There must be many of you out there who, faced with increasing government intervention in the day-to-day business of treating wood, have asked themselves, how something as supposedly innocent and worthwhile as wood preservation could possibly lead to the day to day struggle for self-preservation ----?

Any attempt to assess the risks versus the benefits of wood protection must include something known, under present-day

jargon, as an economic impact study, whereby the value, or the loss - depending on which way you look at it - of restricting currently used preservatives and systems considered hazardous to humans and the environment, is measured against the value to the nation as a whole in continuing with their use ---- more commonly known as the price of progress.

Last year during the preparation of a paper for our Vancouver meeting on the growth of the wood preserving industry, I tried to gather as much information as I could on the yearly volumes of pressure treated wood products by end use and preservative type breakdown.

Upon consulting the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in Vancouver I was advised that aside from a variety of staff preservative breakdowns, redundancies and early retirements, there existed no well defined data of the kind I was seeking. As I was later to discover, Stats Canada did in fact have more information on the subject than they first realized. Further delving did produce some figures which at least gave some indication of the yearly volumes of commodities treated by preservative type.

Nevertheless even by Stats Canada's own admission the figures are undervalued since they only pertain to those operations that are classified as manufacturer-preservers ---- those who have sawmill or remanufacturing capabilities.

During this search for information on the value of pressure treated products in Canada, it soon became painfully obvious that nowhere did there exist detailed accurate figures of the kind that could give a true estimate of the value of pressure treated products in Canada ---- clearly our federal government had no expert knowledge of the economic status of the industry ---- and worse still neither had the industry.

This is a matter that needs urgent attention. For if no one can answer clearly and confidently the value of wood preservation to our economy, how can we, when confronted by government restrictions, justify its continuance.....??

On the basis of the information provided by Stats Canada I would estimate that this years production would be about twenty seven million cubic feet at a cost to the user of somewhere in the order of two hundred million dollars.

In the event that this years production had gone into service untreated it would probably last five years before replacement was required some wood might last longer, but for sure, some would have rotted out before that period.

By 1989 the cost of replacing all this material would be two hundred million dollars for the wood alone, plus a labor cost of at least the same, for a total of four hundred million dollars and assuming that untreated wood was used for successive year's demand, then by 1994, allowing for a continuing seven percent increase in annual demand plus a similar annual inflation factor, the annual loss would have doubled to eight hundred million dollars hardly chicken feed in anyone's fiscal language.....!

Hopefully that brief glimpse at the pressure treating industry's contribution to our economy will tell you something of its importance in our daily life.

The other area of vital concern to our lumber industry is the prevention of fungal stain and decay on green wood shipped abroad. It has been calculated by Forintek and COFI that if none of this material was sprayed or dipped with an anti-fungal agent, the loss due to decay, degrade and ultimate rejection at the port of entry would be in the order of one billion dollars yearly one thousand million dollars!

Clearly, these examples of the potential losses incurred by a total curtailment of preventative treatment are extreme and are only presented to illustrate the very worst that could occur but they are also presented to stress the importance of our industry, not only in its preservation advantages for our nation's future structures, but also because it is one of the most obvious ways of conserving our imperilled future wood supply.

During my travels throughout North America I have seen some clean and dirty ways of treating wood. I have seen some plants with no sump pits, that regularly discharge waste preservative onto bare earth. I have seen supposed waste treatment lagoons that are contained by nothing more than two feet of dyked soil..... the sort of thing you might have built as a kid at the seaside for keeping out the sea until that final wave caves it in.

One thing I can assure you is that no amount of economic justification is worth that kind of wishful thinking. One day that wave will come and topple the enterprise if you don't build a solid unbreachable support for it; and for some that wave has come already with dire consequences.

Personally I believe that if the industry as a whole demonstrates a sense of public as well as corporate responsibility by building and planning for a safe operation for now and the future, it will ultimately cost far less than the small savings that can be realized by doing it wrong....

With regard to use of currently accepted preservatives, I would in turn urge discretion on the part of the Government agencies in regulating against any of them on the basis of data originating from tests that bear no relationship to how the wood is treated or used in service.

Compared to some of the risks incurred in other industries ours will remain minimal so long as we exercise common sense precautions in the way we administer the technique of preserving wood.....

I feel confident we can continue friendly and meaningful dialogue with those from Agriculture Canada, the Environmental Protection Service and other regulatory bodies and, through the collective spirit of this association, have the courage to accept what is indefensible and the strength to challenge what is not acceptable.