

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CCA TREATED TIMBER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

What is CCA treated timber?

CCA is an abbreviation for the preservative known as copper chrome arsenate. This preservative is used to protect non-durable timber from attack by fungi, termites, wood boring insects, and marine borers. The treatment is applied under pressure in a controlled industrial environment and has been widely used to produce durable and economic outdoor building products for over 70 years.



Where is CCA treated timber most commonly used?

CCA treated timber is used widely in the construction of timber decks and boardwalks, pergolas, guard rails, fencing, retaining walls, vineyards, playgrounds and a multitude of other recreational, building and industrial uses. Its longevity and durability provide a renewable, maintenance-free and cost-effective material for outdoor use.

Are there any restrictions on the use of CCA in treating timber?

The Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), who regulate the use of wood preservatives, recently reviewed CCA as a timber treatment reinforcing its status as a safe, durable, and inexpensive way to preserve wood for most outdoor purposes. The APVMA however, has adopted a precautionary position by proposing some restrictions on the future use of CCA in the treatment of timber to for children's playground equipment, garden furniture, picnic tables, exterior seating, handrails and domestic decking. The restrictions will be effective from March 2006.

Why has the APVMA proposed restrictions on the use of CCA treated timber in some uses?

The APVMA review report refers to structures "with which members of the public are likely to come into intimate and frequent contact". The regulator was primarily concerned with dislodgeable surface residues, notably arsenic, and whether hand-to-mouth behaviour by children during contact with such residues poses an unacceptable risk, for example when they use the local treated timber playground equipment.



The APVMA was not entirely satisfied on this point, and although it found no evidence of adverse health impacts, it chose to limit the use of CCA treated timber for some products. The APVMA stated that there was insufficient information available on Australian conditions to determine whether or not exposure to CCA treated timber where there was likely to be hand-to-mouth contact posed an unacceptable public health risk.

What about existing structures?

The APVMA has not recommended any removal of existing structures, stating that it has no regulatory authority over existing structures. It does note, however, that no regulatory authority in the USA, Canada or Europe has recommended the dismantling of existing structures.

There is no scientific evidence to suggest there are adverse health effects resulting from the use of CCA treated timber. In fact, the APVMA has stated in its report that "*...there was no compelling evidence from the available data to conclude that there was likely to be an unacceptable risk to public health from exposure to arsenic from CCA-treated timber*". The APVMA confirms in its report that the level of arsenic in treated timber is lower than many sources found in water and food. Arsenic also occurs naturally in all soils.

Are any other timber treatment options available to replace CCA?

Yes. Treated timber alternatives to CCA include ACQ, Copper Azole and some light organic solvent preservatives (LOSPs).



Whilst these alternatives are more expensive than CCA they offer a solution for H3 level treatment of products sourced from Australia's renewable and sustainable plantation timber estate. CCA, ACQ and CuAz can also be used for the higher hazard levels, H4 and H5. In addition CCA can continue to be used for marine exposure, H6. The alternative products will be offered where required to replace CCA treatment under the APVMA ruling. They may appear similar in appearance to CCA but will carry different labelling.