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TimberTrader_{news}

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Published 12 times per year by:

Paragon Media Pty Limited

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Circulation: proprietors, managers and executives in all sectors of the timber and building materials industries including merchants, building material centres, hardware stores, timber window and door manufacturers, truss and frame manufacturers, timber flooring retailers, stair, balustrade and solid timber furniture manufacturers and their associated suppliers and industry associations throughout Australia.

Established October 1985
ISSN 1035/4298
Print Post Approved: 100002694

Email: query@timbertradernews.com
Website: www.timbertradernews.com

Subscriptions for 12 editions:

Australia: \$99 (incl GST)
New Zealand: A\$120
Overseas Airmail: AU\$250

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PHOTO: COURTESY IVS LABS

SPECIAL



Why treat timbers?

Timber treatments are a highly targeted set of options for adding value and quality assurance to framing, interior and exterior timbers. But the industry still undervalues treatment. Now a new AS 1604 with a mandatory verification process looks set to help suppliers receive a better return on their R&D investment.

COVER CREDIT: Photo courtesy AKD Softwoods

Timber Trader acknowledges the Cammeraygal people, Traditional Custodians of the land on which this publication is produced, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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**Proudly Printed
In Australia**



E-newsletter subscribers: **3697**

Average Net Distribution: 1599
Period ending September 2016

Source: Audited Media Association of Australia; CAB Total Distribution Audit. For further information visit www.auditedmedia.org.au

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An AKD staff member with freshly dried flood-process treated packs of H2F framing timbers.

Treat you right

The Australian Standard for timber treatment was recently updated to deliver clarity on treated timber. Now we just need merchants, users and regulators to follow suit. BY DONYALE HARRISON

Forgive my love of Spaghetti Westerns, but timber treatment at the moment is a bit *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. The Good is played by treated timber itself: a well-priced, reliable product with reputable and collaborative chemical suppliers backing it up, plus a revamped Australian Standard (see page 12). The Bad is the marketplace's understanding of the product; while most suppliers and some retailers have an excellent knowledge of which treatment is best for what application, that often falls apart when we get to builders and retail

customers. And The Ugly is the labyrinthine tangle of regulations surrounding the use and disposal of treated product, though at least that has had a wee facelift this year.

I spoke with several leading voices in the treatment sector for a clearer understanding of what treated timbers can offer their fabricator, builder and retailer customers right now, plus insights into some of the myths that persist regarding the product and some of the regulatory difficulties around Australia, as well as innovative solutions for producers and users alike.

RANGE OF OPTIONS

Professor Jeffrey J Morrell, director of the National Centre for Timber Durability and Design Life at the University of the Sunshine Coast, studied Forest Biology, Plant Pathology, Forest Pathology and Mycology in the US. A 30+-year career in the field has seen him marry his interests in tree health with a commitment to getting the best out of timber once it's harvested, so he is particularly focused on treated timbers.

"Most people, when they think of treated wood, they think of CCA," says Morrell. "But

that's just a segment. We've moved far away from broadly toxic molecules that were very effective but had other issues and into much more refined chemistry."

While the term 'treated timber' is used as a catch-all, in reality it encompasses many very different products. "We have very different preservatives for different needs," says Dave Gover, general manager of R&D at AKD Softwoods. "Our H2F framing timber is treated with a spray-on termite deterrent. That same insecticide is commonly used in multiple other everyday applications including in the home and in farming, and that timber is used for framing pretty much anywhere south of the tropics."

"Then for outdoor structural products like pergolas, decks, handrails or other above-ground, outside exposed structural applications, we have a LOSP-treated H3 product, typically in structural framing sizes, from 70mm to 290mm. In our landscaping

Disposal at end of product life is a key concern in the treatment sector, with the rest of the timber industry following.

product, the big one for us is the sleeper market. We do a lot. There's two treatments we use there: common CCA or a micronised copper azole system that has a dye in it to give it an attractive reddish tint. It's very popular in the landscape sector and that red colour is stable over time, it doesn't change as it weathers."

The copper-based treatment is particularly popular in applications where legislation bans CCA, including high human contact areas and kids' play equipment.

"There's more choice in treatments available now," Gover says. "Part of the challenge for us is working out which choices we want to provide. And they have to work in the finished product, so we also have a bunch of process control that we apply to our production."

Processes, ranging from the preparation of timber to concentrations of the preservative mixes and the levels of penetration and retention of chemical in the timber, are monitored and regularly tested.

"If we're going to modify wood in a way that is intended to make it more durable, we need to make sure we're actually doing what we say we are," says Gover. "Then when someone takes that sleeper or piece of outdoor timber and uses it in the application it's designed for, they can have confidence it will last the way it's expected to."

The suppliers aren't alone in that focus on quality. Testing laboratories provide comprehensive support and the major chemical providers are active partners in keeping their customers on top of changing legislation and innovations.

"End of life is one of the key areas we've been focused on lately," says Troy Justice, marketing specialist Oceania at LSI. "That was one of the drivers around the development of our Tanalith K product [a metal-free CCA alternative for outdoor products, used in Roundwood Solutions' Tanapost range] that was launched last year.

"Now we're relaunching Tanalith Q, which is an alkaline copper quaternary product to complement our well-established Tanalith E copper azole product. We've had it registered for a while, but not in production.

To ensure we continue to address the needs of the treated timber market, we constantly re-evaluate our preservative products to see if they are offering the best outcome for our customers, including the issues around disposal of treated timber. The end of life code in Queensland allows ACQ-treated timber to be composted and we realised, 'we have a couple of customers who can really benefit from this now,' so we started manufacturing it locally."

Disposal at end of product life has become a key concern for those in the treatment sector, with other parts of the timber industry following more slowly. "It's one of the biggest issues for us at the moment," says Nick Livanes, business development manager at Koppers Performance Chemicals, "along with the new treatment standards in Australia. AS1604 was completely revised earlier this year. It was a major undertaking; the old series which was partly Australia only and partly Australia/New Zealand is now a fully A/NZ set of standards for treating timber.

"It takes a long time to bring everyone up to speed whenever new standards come out. The biggest change is there are more and different requirements for how you verify you're treating the timber properly."

Koppers and LSI have both been working with the industry to educate on the changes in the standard, especially the new requirements for verification. "This is the whole part two of the Standard now," Livanes says. "It has three parts, the first one has essentially amalgamated all the requirements for what you treat to, the second one is verifying that you're treating properly and the third one is the test methods."

PROOF OF PROMISE

The Standard's emphasis on verification has two reasons behind it. The first, obviously, is that it's important people get what they pay for, especially when they're entrusting the safety of their house frame to treatment. The second is that the chemicals used in that treatment are used sparingly and are generally fairly benign – if you're not a termite or borer – so it's important to make sure they're applied properly.

"Treatments used for framing contain very low levels of insecticides and there are treatments used for decking that are mostly organic," Morrell says. "Many of them are the same chemicals we use on our skin. It would be useful to get people to try and understand that a little better. For example, the azoles, which are very popular in the decking market are also used for athlete's foot control. The same specific mechanism works on the decay fungus and doesn't allow it to produce cell walls or membranes, whether it's on your skin on in your decking timbers."

Just as fungal creams only work on your >>

PHOTO: COURTESY AKD SOFTWOODS

“Without some clear quality marks, it’s been difficult for those doing it very well to get any sort of premium in the market.”

feet if you follow the instructions, timber treatment also needs to be applied in ways specific to the species and application. Independent testing laboratories like IVS Labs regularly test samples of product to make sure the right amount of the right treatment is being applied in the right way, and that all the manufacturing processes are working as they ought to be.

With offices in Hamilton, New Zealand and a testing lab in Brisbane, the company has an excellent understanding of AS 1604.

“We test for anyone and everyone who requires it,” says Christina Pegler, technical manager at IVS Labs. “The new standard does have its interesting updates – they require a lot more people to be doing timber preservative testing, so for us it’s about being available. We’ve seen a lot more enquiries around the testing of local and imported timber since the new standard has come out. Our general turnaround time is between three and five days.”

As well as providing testing for suppliers, IVS can test new products coming into the Australian or New Zealand markets and give would-be importers a number in terms of the degree or amount of preservative in that particular timber and whether it’s likely to meet A/NZ standards. “The power of this isn’t well understood yet at the retail level,” says Peter Webb, chief executive, IVS Group. “Certainly the Timber Preservers Association of Australia (TPAA, www.tpaa.com.au) has been quite good at promoting verification and providing a degree of education for treaters, but the availability of a test just to check that products are meeting Australian standards

hasn’t been widely known at the retail level. And that’s both in terms of the hardware store selling to the construction sector and also to the retail/DIY market.

“Where we do see better understanding is in government procurement. Many of those contracts specifically require verification against the standard.”

Webb suggests that this is a role for industry organisations, particularly working with builders. “Timber Queensland has been active in trying to ensure that everyone in the supply chain understands their responsibility,” Webb says. “But I think we all have a bit of work to do to make sure the responsibility flows right through. The more information we can get out there the better, and the more suppliers can understand how they can show they are verifying the outcome of their treatment, the better for everyone.”

As a New Zealander, Webb has seen what happens when standards, building practice and verification don’t align.

“We had the leaky homes saga in NZ back around 2000,” he says. “That drove a very strong and immediate push to ensure that treatment was all verified. It’s now required under the building standards in NZ that there is a quality program in place and verification. That’s really changed how New Zealand deals with quality marks and verification; now the minimum standard is one that is verified and run under a quality system.”

Unfortunately, the Australian market isn’t at the same place. While there is a lot of excellence in both timber and chemical suppliers, for the most part, Webb says, “People don’t have a great deal of

understanding of timber and the variability of current treatments. What we’re seeing is that people have historically been buying on price rather than on quality. Without some clear quality marks, it’s been difficult for those doing it very well to get any sort of premium in the market. So historically, it’s been almost a race to the bottom as far as pricing. And that sort of market isn’t driving a quality product.”

Webb says Australia is getting there. “Progress is slow, but it takes time when you take a whole industry with you. You can’t take pieces of a supply chain to a different level, the whole supply chain needs to understand and move together in lockstep around quality away from a price-driven procurement to a quality-driven procurement.”

Livanes agrees: “There’s so much focus on price. Our new-age products like MicroPro may be more expensive in some cases, but they come with a strong story on sustainability and they deliver excellent results. Some of the conversations I have go, ‘Oh yeah, we can see it’s next-generation and better, but the market won’t wear an increase in price.’ History has shown that consumers will make the move to a better product when they are given all the information.”

SUSTAINABLE CHEMICALS

Some people sniff at the idea of talking about treated timber as a sustainable product, but it is, in multiple ways. The alternative name for the sector, Preserved Timber, sums it up neatly: the product will last considerably longer than untreated timber. Immediately that means each tree cut down has a longer serviceable life in a house, deck, etc.

Australia doesn’t currently price the carbon being sequestered in that frame or retaining wall over that service life. But as environmental concerns increasingly drive investment decisions, this is a strong good news story for us. It does, however, require an educated market. Recent actual news »

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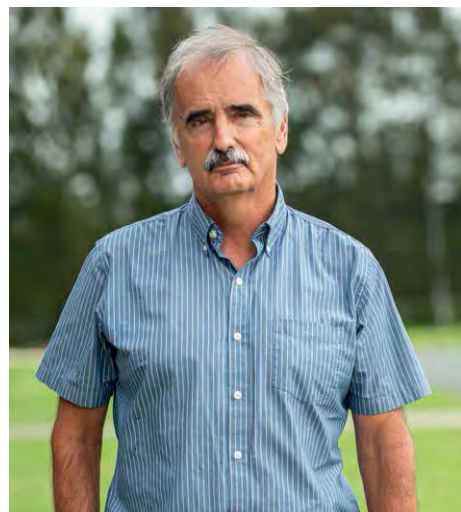
- **A range of outdoor treatments.** CCA, ACQ and LOSP from pergolas and decks to utility poles and wharfs
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Above: Professor Jeffrey J. Morrell



Above: Testing samples of preserved timber for active ingredients at IVS Labs.

PHOTO: COURTESY JEFFREY MORRELL; COURTESY IVS LABS



Above: Light framing timbers, ply and EWP can all be treated and tested to verify they contain the level of active ingredients the labels suggest.

stories have complained about the levels of chemicals in treated timber and suggested it will be a long-lasting problem in landfills.

Morrell shakes his head at the idea. “We tend to have this toxic phobia,” he says. “But we forget that we are surrounded by chemicals. In naturally durable woods, that durability functions because the chemicals in the tree – both growing and harvested – are really toxic. And we accept that risk is OK.

“If you look at where regulations have come in, they’ve been less on the treated product and more on the process of putting it in the wood. Because that’s where the risk is greatest; you’re using concentrated chemicals in an industrial environment. And so the regulatory regime around that is much more intense than it would be for that piece of treated timber you’re going to build a deck out of, because for that person the risk is quite low. Regulations are driven by risk,” Morrell adds.

Gover and his teams at AKD are used to managing that risk for their staff and product. He says, “We do H2F LOSP treatments, as well as H2F through a sprayline, and CCA and copper at various plants.

“All our treatment plants have some form of containment facility, depending on what the timber and the treatment is. That ranges from concrete pads for controlled drainage – any dripping going on there or rainwater on the pad all goes back to our sump and then that water is re-used for part of the treatment process. Some of the plants are completely shedded so you’ve got a drip pad under a canopy and everything stays out of

“We’re not using the chemicals people worry about, and that’s important.”

the weather until the preservatives are well and truly dried out and fixed within the timber. That also controls any escape of active chemicals and solvents.”

Light solvents are used in the LOSP process to dissolve the insecticides and fungicides required for the timber. “It’s a vacuum pressure impregnation process but it’s a much lower pressure than would normally be used with other treatments,” Gover says. “The other big advantages with LOSP are that, from a processing point of view, you don’t have any drip time. The solvent flashes off pretty rapidly, and because it’s not water-based, it doesn’t change the moisture content of the wood and you have more stability for the product.”

This targeted selection of treatment ingredients and processes has come about through plants and chemical suppliers working closely with each other.

As Morrell says, “We’ve got better at narrowing down the chemicals we add, so we’re not using chlordane for controlling termites, we’re not using DDT, we’re not using the things that people worry about and that’s an important message to get out.”

Justice, agrees, pointing out that while the problem is frustrating when talking with consumers, it creates real difficulties when the same attitude is held higher up the food chain. “We still have regulatory bodies that don’t appreciate the differences between preservatives,” he says.

“Some look at every treatment as though it were CCA. Yes we still use CCA where it’s needed, but the actives used in blue pine framing are used in multiple agricultural products and a lot of those are applied directly to soil or vegetable crops. In some cases the treated timber has a fraction of the insecticide in the agricultural product, yet if you mulch or bury the treated timber, you’ve potentially broken the law because you’ve contaminated the land with treated timber.

“That’s why we’re pushing for each of these products to be assessed individually. As an industry, we need to drive change through the regulatory bodies, to say ‘this isn’t the old generation of preservatives, this is new and improved and it needs to be considered on its own merit.’”

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The one-size fits all regulatory approach has complicated end-of-life disposal for treated timbers. While some states offer re-use pathways for timbers treated with specific preservatives, in others, “authorities, waste disposal companies and tips aren’t quite sure what to do with it, it all gets lumped into one category and generally goes into landfill, where it’s no use,” Livanes says.

“If we can recycle it for other purposes, »

PHOTO: COURTESY IVS LABS

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Above: A range of treated timbers from AKD Softwoods. From left, Endura is LOSP-treated H3 structural graded timber; Terminator is an H2F termite-resistant blue pine product and Ironwood Sienna Sleepers are a landscape product that utilise an H4 copper-based treatment.

“We need a circular economy approach. There is a lot of interest in this right now from timber processors, F&T manufacturers and utilities.”

including energy production, that’s better. Some of the plants use certain quantities of treated timber in their energy recovery to run things like kilns. I think there’s more scope for that, but there are a lot of environmental and other requirements to burn ordinary wood and more for treated. It’s certainly not impossible. It just means you need more sophisticated combustion and recovery of the metals and other components.”

Koppers is also working with its partners on more recovery of railway sleepers and utility poles, an area that leading recycled timber suppliers like Kennedy’s Timbers have shown can be highly profitable.

“Timber by and large isn’t going to degrade in a landfill,” says Morrell. “It’s very resistant to degradation because there’s no oxygen, and having a little bit of chemical in there isn’t going to change that. So what can we do to stop it going into landfill?”

“We need a circular economy approach. There is a lot of interest in this right now. We’ve been talking to most of the timber processors in Australia as well as frame and truss manufacturers, vineyard people and utilities. They’re all looking at their timber and asking ‘how do I at least not make it a liability and maybe make it an asset?’ And so there’s a lot of interest in recycling that material into some other use.”

Utilities companies, railways and councils have a comparatively easy job, with an established market for recycled poles, sleepers, wharves, etc and a lot of ‘clean’, quality timber remaining in those products. For other products, the job is harder.

“Right now, if you have an old hardwood house and you’re taking it apart, that’s worth recovering, though the economics are tough

because your labour costs are so high,” Morrell says. “In our work, we try to find the ‘easy buttons’, where there’s a facility for collecting materials and it’s relatively clean. So utility poles have problems at the base, but you can re-cut the main part and there’s a lot of good timber left. We need to look at more pathways like that with vineyard poles, because they’re becoming a disposal issue. The advantage there is that it’s a single commodity, so once we work out how to move them from their far-flung locations, the same solution will work for all.

“The frame and truss manufacturers deliver a really clean resource, some treated and some not, and we need to work out how to use it. But construction and demolition stuff is a lot more difficult because you’ve got nails and other non-timber debris. It’s probably the hardest one to look at at the start. The costs of disposal help to drive change here, some councils already have levies for disposal. I think this is our next big challenge as an industry.”

LSI will continue to work with its customers and the wider industry on the issue, Justice says: “There are companies in the EWP sector already doing good work. where they recover treated and untreated timber and they’re processing it and bringing it back as a feedstock for their products, which is very clever.

The problem he identifies is that it’s not an industry-wide effort. While there are some areas of cooperation between the major chemical companies, timber producers and manufacturers (working at an industry-wide level to find re-use and recycling opportunities and in parts of education), there needs to be a continuous

drive towards acceptance by regulators that will enable reuse and recycling.

“We participated in a working group with FTMA looking for solutions for leftover blue pine framing,” says Justice. “The outcomes were limited, in part due to the potential regulatory burden for individual sites. At the time the most effective solution was to send offcuts through to wood panel manufacturers who could reuse it as a feedstock. As an industry, we’re competing with steel, which is an engineered solution that has been forced to look at all these things upfront. Engineered wood products have also had to consider what the feedstock is and what happens at the end of its life, hence they are likely to have systems and processes in place to deal with different feedstocks. In light framing timber, we haven’t and that impacts our otherwise solid claims of being an environmentally sustainable product.”

Even once pathways for re-use are found, change is still hard on the regulation side. APVMA registers the preservative product but doesn’t make the rules for the treated product. In some states the EPA make the rules for the reuse of timber, yet other states say they just police the rules.

“In Victoria you may also need to speak with several different departments to get work in progress,” Justice says. “Each state has its own regulation. We worked with three or four government departments on our Tanalith K product just to have it assessed properly and identify a clear path where we could utilise it and have it recognised for what it could do. So when we’re working towards a goal like recycling, we need to lobby as an industry to enable recognition through government departments to more readily enable reuse of treated timber.”

Morrell offers one upside: “In landfill, you’re still sequestering carbon, so in some ways you’re still doing a good thing.”

EDUCATING THE ENDPOINTS

In recent years *TTN* has produced several booklets for suppliers and end users on the specifics of treatment types and their uses

(such as this one) but even some timber merchants aren’t always clear on which level of treatment (H1-H6) is most appropriate for a specific application or details like which fittings work best with which chemicals or how to treat cuts.

The chemical companies have taken on the role of educators here. “We try to be as transparent as possible with our products,” Livanes says. “Like everyone, we make Safety Data Sheets available and we try to make ours as plain English as possible so we can educate the customers and the market about the safe use and disposal of treated timber. Is it accessible and easy for the general public? Maybe not.

“We get quite a few enquiries through our website, often about safety or ‘should I use this in a particular application?’ I enjoy sitting down with Joe Public and talking about which product they should be using in their veggie bed. Those enquiries are good, but as an integrated industry from the suppliers to the shops, we could be doing better. And it’s not only safety, it’s things that are fundamental to the product. In our guarantees and recommendations, resealing treated timber when it’s cut is emphasised. Particularly for outdoor treated timber. But some retailers

don’t mention it. Those remedial preservatives should be on racks next to the timber!”

Livanes says that the risk of not getting it right is that a failure of one product becomes seen as a failure of timber, and so we lose market share. Steel producers are heavily targeting the Queensland home frames market at the moment, with campaigns focused on pest infestation and shortages to lure builders away from timber.

Justice agrees. He believes the industry should be positioning itself more on its strengths and working together to both solve issues and promote both primary timber usage and re-use. “Each business is always going to have competitors selling similar products in the market. Other timber producers are competition but are not the enemy. Why aren’t we as the timber industry promoting the benefits of timber and addressing the end of life issues over that of alternatives?”

LSI would like to do more. “We used to have a campaign, known as the Tanalised Advantage, where we would help to educate timber wholesalers and end users handling treated timber,” Justice says. “In recent years, we’ve moved to just providing this to our customers so they could better market

their products and brands, but we have noticed there is still a need for generalised training and education again. Our businesses in the UK and US have continued to provide general treated timber training, so it probably is something we will do again here.”

Like Livanes, he finds it frustrating when requirements like remedial preservatives for cuts and holes are forgotten. General advice such as: “For garden beds, we’d always recommend that you protect the treated timber inside the bed with a liner to reduce the bacterial activity on the inside of the timber and create a bit of a barrier against persistent moisture,” Justice says. “Retailers have an important role to play here.”

Gover has at times been impressed with the level of knowledge supplied by retailers but points out that education is an ongoing need. He says, “You hear of people who get a piece of timber that may have been treated for termite resistance for framing and say ‘well, it’s treated, I can use it wherever’. We have new people coming into landscaping or building and we’ve got to continue to provide the information to each new batch of product users. Retailers are a really good starting point to get that information out to the average user of



Above: Treated timber is labelled with its active ingredient, hazard class and information regarding the treatment plant that is sufficient for the end user to trace back the product to its treatment source. See www.tpaa.com.au/treatment-plants/ for a list of treatment plant codes.

a product, but we need to make it clear and available to them, and that's something AKD and other wholesalers are working on, too."

Then, of course, there are the actual educational facilities. "The other channel is making sure we have partnerships with the likes of carpentry TAFE's and getting that information in front of them," Gover says. "They do a pretty good job there and are always keen for strong industry partnerships."

Morrell admits that the problems are far from simple, but is pleased to see more suppliers considering end of life concerns as part of their product design. "The most likely to succeed path is having suppliers design for recovery," he says. "That's where I think we're going to have to go with a lot of materials: plan so that at the end I can burn it or compost it or make a panel out of it. And the logistics have to be a part of it: will you need to move that waste product? The hard part is moving it. This is just too big a country with too few people."

Meanwhile, the short term focus remains on making sure all parts of the market understand the new standards and the value proposition of treated timber products. Webb was too polite to say it, but this could be the opportunity for Australia to catch up with New Zealand when it comes to moving from a price-driven to a quality-driven market.

"We produced a quality assurance program and introduced it to the Australian market about five years ago," Webb says. "At the time we had very little uptake or interest, but that's changed now. We've all got work to do to encourage particularly the consumer to be looking for a quality mark or something to show them that the treatment actually has met treatment standards and will deliver the quality they're paying for." **T**

For more, visit www.akd.com.au, www.ivslabs.com.au, <https://koppers.com.au>, www.lonzawoodprotection.com.au/APAC and www.usc.edu.au/research/forest-research-institute/national-centre-for-timber-durability-and-design-life

AS1604 updates

Craig Kay's February 2021 In The Frame column contained an excellent summary of the Standard changes. We're pleased to reprint an edited version.

Previously AS/NZS 1604 Specification for preservation treatment standard existed as five parts:

- Part 1 – Sawn and round timber (an AS standard only, not a joint AS/NZS)
- Part 2 – Reconstituted wood-based products
- Part 3 – Plywood
- Part 4 – Laminated Veneer Lumber (LVL)
- Part 5 – Glued laminated timber products.

The companion standard to the AS/NZS 1604 series was the AS/NZS 1605 series – Methods for sampling and analysing timber preservatives and preservative-treated timber.

The AS/NZS series standard has now been extensively revised. There are now only three parts dealing individually with products and treatment, demonstrating compliance and test methods. They are:

1. **AS/NZS 1604 Preservative-treated wood-based products Part 1: Products and treatment.** The former Parts 1-5 of the existing standard have now been amalgamated into one. This change reflects the fact that the timber preservative chemicals are essentially common for all wood-based products, thus it made good sense to amalgamate five different parts outlining similar provisions, into one document.

In essence, the retention volumes and penetration requirements for preservative chemicals within the penetration zones of the wood in existing standards have remained unchanged, apart from some minor common sense decimal place reductions

to match the available accuracy obtainable from test procedures.

This requires all standard drawings and details that currently reference AS/NZS 1604 parts 2 to 5, to be amended to read AS/NZS 1604:1.

2. **AS/NZS 1604 Preservative-treated wood-based products Part 2: Verification requirements**

It was always assumed that the existing standard implied there needed to be a 100% pass of the retention and penetration requirements listed in Parts 1-5.

Wood is a natural fibre and exhibits variable properties. The characteristic structural values are based upon the lower 5th percentile values with a 75% confidence level: up to 5% of a sample size of 30 or more may exhibit strengths lower than the stated characteristic value. This same concept successfully used all around the world for decades for timber strength values has now been introduced into the timber preservation realm. The different statistical systems developed for AS/NZS 1748 Timber—Solid—Stress-graded for structural purposes have been modified to consider preservative retention. These statistical methods suit the new paradigm for volumes of timber to be preservative treated as part of the in-line production process.

3. **AS/NZS 1604 Preservative-treated wood-based products Part 3: Test methods** The AS/NZS 1605 series Methods for sampling and analysing timber preservatives and preservative-treated timber has been renamed, and will now be Part 3 of the AS/NZS 1604 series, thus keeping all the components of timber preservation under the one standard instead of two different ones.

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