

INFO SHEET No. PO03

This Info Sheet contains information about the use of treated timber on organic farms. The information should be read in conjunction with the NASAA Organic Standard.

For further Information contact Certification Officer or email to certification. standards@nasaa.com.au

Treated Timber

BACKGROUND

It is often asked why the "new and replacement use" of treated timber is no longer allowed unless written permission is obtained from the NASAA office, especially given the difficulties in sourcing alternatives to treated timber. The following information will explain the wider implications of this decision, and where to obtain alternatives to treated timber.

There are many types of preservation chemicals for timber of which the most commonly utilised preservatives are Creosote and Copper Chromium Arsenate (CCA), the former having been prohibited under the NASAA Standards for many years due to the well researched environmental and health implications.

CCA is a waterborne timber preservative as opposed to oil borne preservatives such as Creosote and is currently the most widely used timber preservative in applications where human contact is more likely, such as in fence posts and decking.

Despite such widespread use the constituents of CCA are known to be toxic to human, aquatic life and plants and contamination of both soils and groundwater with CCA constituents at timber preservation sites is a major problem. There are three significant aspects of consideration to the use of CCA timber; the production; the potential for leachate of the constituent properties; and the safe disposal of CCA timber. The latter two will be discussed below.

Leachate

Research has demonstrated that in some situations chemicals in treated timber can leach into soil and groundwater causing potential environmental harm. The use of such products in Germany, Japan, Scandinavia and parts of the United States has been restricted and in some cases banned due to environmental concerns.

NASAA has also carried out testing on CCA timber used in raised vegetable beds and found significantly higher levels of arsenic in soil, however caution should be noted in interpreting such results as other variables were not taken into account. Other studies have not show any evidence of accumulation of metals in leaf and stem tissue over time.

Disposal

Whilst research remains divided as to the potential for the constituents of CCA to leach into the surrounding environment there is no such division with regards to the safe disposal of CCA treated timber. This is why NASAA is not advocating the removal of CCA timber already utilised on certified production areas.



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Treated Timber cont'd

Provided there is no direct contact with certified produce, and that in situations of high risk sampling is carried out, there is no logic in demanding the universal removal of CCA treated timber currently in production.

The disposal of CCA treated timber is an environmental problem which will only worsen with increased use of such a product. The primary methods for disposal of CCA treated timber are reuse, disposal on site or disposal to landfill.

It is unlikely that existing landfills will be able to accept increasing loads of preservative treated timber without impacting on the environment (EPA consultation draft "Review of the Landfill Disposal Risks and the Potential for Recovery and Recycling of Preservative Treated Timber, 1999). The greatest potential for environmental harm is from leaching of preservation chemical from the timber to the soils impacting on soil quality, surface water quality and groundwater quality. Incineration is prohibited in Australia due to the concentration of toxic metals in the ash and the increase of mobility of such a substance.

The above summary has excluded the production of CCA treated timber and the related environmental problems however it has demonstrated that there is enough body of evidence to suggest that the organic industry has done the "right thing" by enforcing the "precautionary principle" with regards to the use of CCA treated timber. Below is a list of sources and types of alternatives to CCA treated timber:

Ammoniacal copper quat (ACQ)
Recycled Plastic (i.e. Omnipole)
Steel
Hardwood (i.e. Jarrah and Cyprus, Redgum)

The following companies are listed suppliers of alternatives to treated (CCA) timber:

Cooee Products (07) 5443 5888
Ecospecifier <http://ecospecifier.org>
Pinetec (WA) www.pinetec.net/
Australian Hardwoods www.auswood.com.au

Source: Review of the Landfill Disposal Risks and the Recovery and Recycling of Preservative Treated Timber, Nov 1999, EPA

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