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February 9, 2006

Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins Street East
Melbourne
VIC 8003.

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Waste Generation & Resource Efficiency Inquiry

I would like to bring to your attention, the problems associated with the disposal of CCA-treated timber. The disposal of CCA-treated timber is of great concern because of the large volume of anticipated waste and the lack of safe disposal options, given the toxicity of the treated timber. If CCA-treated timber is incinerated the smoke and the ash can be toxic, so it is usually disposed of in municipal landfills in Australia, where it continues to leach arsenic. In Europe it is categorised as a hazardous waste for these reasons.

Reuse options are limited because of the risks associated with them but they are being developed to minimize this risk. In particular, CCA-treated timber should not be reused for garden mulch or animal bedding or for any use where humans and animals can have close contact with it. Methods to remove the toxic components from the treated wood are still in their infancy and have cost or environmental problems associated with them.

I have attached the relevant chapter from a report that Nina Lansbury and I have prepared on CCA-treated timber which outlines the problems associated with CCA-timber as a waste product. In it we concluded that it was necessary to:

**classify CCA-treated timber waste as hazardous
waste and ensure its safe disposal**

The full report is available for download at:

<http://homepage.mac.com/herinst/CCAtimber/home.html>

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sharon Beder.

excerpt from:

Treated Timber, Ticking Time-bomb



The Need for a Precautionary Approach to the Use of Copper Chrome Arsenate (CCA) as a Timber Preservative

February 2005

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Full report at: <http://homepage.mac.com/herinst/CCAtimber/home.html>

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4 WASTE OPTIONS

The eventual disposal of CCA-treated timber is of great concern to many stakeholders, due to the volume of anticipated waste and the lack of safe disposal options, given the toxicity of the treated timber. If CCA-treated timber is burned the smoke and the ash can be toxic (APVMA, 2003e: 6), so it is usually disposed of in municipal landfills where it continues to leach arsenic. In the US, material that leaches arsenic is classified as a hazardous waste and cannot be disposed of in municipal landfills. However, CCA-treated timber has been granted an exemption (Sharp & Walker, 2001: 11).

According to academics at the University of Florida, the exemption in the US was due to CCA involving pentavalent arsenic—a less toxic species of arsenic—and the presumption that the leaching mainly occurred with newly-treated timber. However, recent research on timber weathered for over ten years has found that the pentavalent arsenic is somehow converting to the ‘highly toxic’ trivalent arsenic, in volumes well over the limit for non-hazardous waste. In addition, it is surmised that as the timber’s lignin decomposes, large quantities of arsenic are released from the older wood (Fauteux, 2003). Another study in the *Journal of Hazardous Wastes* has found that arsenic leaching from CCA-treated timber waste disposed of in landfills “is a major concern from a disposal point of view with respect to ground water quality” (Townsend, 2004).

Similarly, in the UK the requirements for safe disposal of hazardous waste now also apply to waste CCA-treated timber so as to prevent air and other polluting emissions (DEFRA, 2003). In Europe discarded CCA-treated timber has been classified as a hazardous waste since 2000 (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 9). This was after the CSTEE raised concerns about the disposal of treated-timber in landfills: ‘The CSTEE wishes to underline that a major source of concern regarding the use of arsenic-containing wood preservatives relates to the high degree of uncertainty regarding the speciation of arsenic during its long-term storage in landfills (the major points of arsenic accumulation), making reliable quantitative predictions about its migration and bioavailability extremely difficult. This is a serious knowledge gap which the CSTEE recommends should be addressed by further research. In the meantime, it would be advisable to exercise caution by limiting the use of arsenic-based wood preservation to those situations where it is absolutely necessary’ (CSTEE 1998).

In Australia, CCA-treated timber waste is not classified as hazardous waste and there is a lack of clear information about how this waste should be disposed. Currently, CCA-treated timber is accepted at the discretion of the landfill operator in NSW, South Australia and Victoria (Smith and Mollah, 2004) and is often collected with other municipal waste. In NSW, CCA-treated timber is a priority waste (although a priority 2 waste rather than a priority 1 waste) on the Extended Producer Responsibility list but it is still accepted at a number of municipal landfill locations (Mitchell, S., NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, *Pers. Comm.*, 15/11/04). In Victoria, “product stewardship agreements on waste avoidance and recovery” will not be established for treated timber till 2009/10 (Ecocycle Victoria, 2003: 17).

Waste Services NSW, which operates 4 landfills and 7 transfer stations, could not provide adequate advice on the customer information line to this researcher as to whether treated timber is a hazardous waste and whether it could be disposed of at any of its four landfill sites (Waste Services NSW, Customer Enquiries, *Pers. Comm.*, 15/11/04). However the Waste Services website stated that no treated timbers would be accepted by Waste Services, as timber waste was reused for chipping for landscape mulches and as biofuel (Waste Services NSW, 2004).

4.1 Volumes

The scale of the waste-treated timber is enormous, particularly if existing CCA-treated timber structures are to be replaced by safer alternatives, as this report recommends. However there are already large amounts of waste CCA-treated timber being produced annually in Australia and overseas. A major source of this is the wine industry.

In 1999, a report prepared for the South Australian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) found that wineries were the largest purchasers of preservative CCA-treated timber in South Australia. They estimated that 75% of the approximate 60 to 120 million vineyard stakes were made from CCA-treated timber. The SA EPA has found the growth of the wine industry has paralleled the increase in CCA timber manufacture. Since annual stake damage is around 15%, it is anticipated that in 2024, a peak volume of between 8 and 16 million posts will require disposal (cited in Smith and Mollah, 2004). There are already 816,000 posts stockpiled (Bell, 2005). The South Australian EPA warns that a toxic disposal crisis is looming, with 'no acceptable disposal option for CCA' in SA and no life cycle management for the heavy metals in the CCA. One way of easing the waste problem would be to encourage the wine industry to change its material choice for vineyard stakes. (Scott, 2004).

A treated timber disposal crisis is already being experienced in California. San Joaquin grape-growers turned to other crops after several difficult seasons, and removed thousands of tonnes of CCA-treated stakes. They are not permitted to burn these due to air pollution risks, and disposal to a landfill is not only costly but brings with it the 'lifetime liability', as disposer identities are logged and they can be held responsible in the event of ensuing problems at the landfill site (Pollock, 2004).

Matthew Warken (2004: 44) notes in his Masters thesis on wood waste in Sydney that "there would still be treated timber in the waste stream for the next 10 – 25 years, even if CCA treatment was banned today".

4.2 Incineration

Combustion of CCA treated timber involves a number of environmental hazards. Ash from CCA-treated timber contains elevated levels of heavy metals. Once burnt, the ash continues to leach heavy metals. Solo-Gabriele *et al* (2003a) confirmed CCA-treated wood ash exceeded the 5 mg/L regulatory level for total arsenic leaching under the US EPA standards. The CSIRO warns that the ash from burnt CCA-treated timber on rural properties should be removed or buried away from stock, as the 'salty contaminated ash ... can cause problems' (CSIRO, 2005). The smoke can also contain high levels of arsine gas and dioxins: 'Studies show that, depending on the combustion conditions, 10-90% of the arsenic present in CCA-treated wood' may go up in the smoke (APVMA, 2003a: 47).

Australian research by Tame *et al* (2003), has tested ash from burnt CCA-treated pine for polychlorinated dioxins (dibenzo-p-dioxins) and furans (polychlorinated dibenzofurans, PCDD/F), well-known atmospheric pollutants. They concluded that these pollutants formed mainly during the smouldering of the char (ash), raising concerns about the impacts after bushfires in residential areas, such as Canberra during 2002. In Canberra 55 sites were contaminated with treated timber ash. Site remediation required removal of 2000 tons of soil, took a year to complete and cost around \$3,000,000 (Godson, W. *Pers. Comm.*, 27/2/05)

The APVMA review recognised the risks associated with incineration and warned that it 'should only occur in very controlled facilities where release of arsenic to the atmosphere is minimised and the potentially highly toxic ash is processed and disposed of appropriately.' For this reason the authority recommends that CCA chemical labels be varied to prevent waste CCA-treated timber

from being incinerated (APVMA, 2003a, p.47). However because of its limited powers the APVMA is not able to regulate potential incineration, although it could have made recommendations on this.

Incineration of CCA-treated timber is in fact banned in some states including NSW. EPA Victoria (2003) has raised concerns about horticulturalists who burn waste such as CCA-treated timber and has fined at least one grapegrower in 2003 for this because of the 'significant risk to human health, the environment and the clean green image...' The South Australian EPA warns that 'Children, pets and farm animals should be excluded from land where CCA ash is present [for example after bushfires]. Animals will want to lick or eat the salty residue and young children, especially those under 5 years, are at high risk from personal contact and ingestion. Animal deaths from ingesting ash have previously been reported on farms in the USA and UK' (SA EPA, 2005).

CCA-treated timber may be incinerated accidentally as a result of house fires and bushfires, or by people ignorant of its dangers when they dispose of waste treated timber in backyard burn-offs. People can also put treated timber into garbage streams that go to municipal incinerators. Fire-fighting organizations such as the country fire services are aware of the hazards associated with burning CCA but seldom know, when they attend a fire, whether the burning timber is CCA.

Perhaps of most concern is the fact that people sometimes burn it in their indoor home fireplaces, without realizing the dangers that they are exposing their families and neighbours to. Because traditional sources of heating wood are becoming scarce and therefore more expensive, scrap timber and off-cuts from building sites are turned to as free sources of timber. 'It is not uncommon to see this rubbish wood, including treated pine etc, piled high in Canberra backyards... not only treated pine but other treated timbers' (Darryl Johnston, *Pers. Comm.* 1/8/03).

CCA-treated timber may also be incinerated when it is mixed with other wood that is used as fuel wood. Often waste wood piles contain some CCA-treated wood, so that it would be hazardous to use them for fuel. Previous research found that 'visual sorting', based on the colour of the treated timber, is not accurate. To prevent the ash being classified as hazardous in the US, wood reused for fuel must contain less than five percent of CCA-treated timber (Solo-Gabriele, *et al*, 2001).

A more specific method for identifying CCA-treated timber is through a stain test. Although this is a workable method, the cost and time required to administer the stain were of particular concern to large recycling facilities. Solo-Gabriele *et al* (2001) claim that the Laser Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) and X-ray Fluorescence Spectroscopy (XRF) that they are developing will provide a faster and cheaper method for sorting waste wood. However both technologies have technological drawbacks and are not ready for commercial use. A trial of a portable hand held X ray device called a XRF metal analyser is being used at Medley USA.

Some research into safer controlled incineration methods that would capture the arsenic and toxic residues has begun but it is in its early states. At the University of Sydney's Chemical Engineering laboratories, research is underway into the possibilities of incinerating CCA-treated timber to recover both the energy as well as the metals (as environmentally stable residues). So far, the researchers have found that at temperatures greater than 400°C the copper and chrome are contained in the ash, while the arsenic is volatilized. The researchers are aiming to recover all three metal components from the waste wood (Stewart *et al*, 2004).

In earlier work undertaken at the University of Sydney for the Western Sydney Waste Board, it was found that at a combustion temperature of 900°C, energy was more efficiently produced than in pyrolysis and gasification at lower temperatures, and arsenic (present as arsenate) was produced in a stable form. The researchers noted that the arsenic produced as off-gas was a concern, although if

combusted in a flash smelter such as those used in the copper industry, the arsenic could probably be captured (CRESTA, 2000). Solo-Gabriele *et al* (2001) report that in Europe pyrolysis technology appears to be further advanced, with ‘two full-scale pyrolysis operations’ in France which claim to recover most of the heavy metals.

4.3 Reuse

A UK analysis of treated wood waste streams found that the ‘Best Practicable Environmental Option’ is reuse, findings that are consistent with the principals of the waste hierarchy employed both in the UK and Australia. (Not producing the waste in the first place, is of course preferable.) However, the researchers did note that reuse markets for wood waste are limited and the value of the waste is low. Additionally, the quality of the wood waste and the risk of contamination were also cited as barriers to this option (Enviros Consulting *et al*, 2004). Similar research from the US found that up to 86 percent of CCA-treated timber from residential decks could be recovered for reuse (Smith *et al*, 2004). Yet in practice it has been found that parks and recreation facilities, in Florida at least, are concerned about the structural integrity of used CCA-treated timber, and prefer not to use it (Solo-Gabriele *et al*, 2000).

However, whilst reuse may deal with the waste disposal problem, it can exacerbate the health and environmental problems associated with the use of CCA-treated timber because it prolongs that use. In Florida, waste CCA-treated timber was prohibited from co-generation plants because of the resulting heavy metals in the ash but the waste was then diverted to mulch production, raising the risk to soil and groundwater through leaching (Solo-Gabriele, *et al*, 2001). Leachate from mulch manufactured from construction and demolition waste, which often contains waste CCA-treated timber failed water quality standards set by the US EPA (Townsend *et al*, 2001). And although the CSIRO highlights the potential use of CCA-treated timber as garden edging and fence posts, it warns against use of CCA-treated products being reused in mulch, animal bedding, beehives’ as well as food chopping boards and boxes used to store or transport food (CSIRO 2005).

Researchers at Michigan State University have investigated the use of CCA-treated timber fibres in wood-cement particle composites. The resulting composite was found to have comparable strength to normal concrete and to withstand strains at peak load that are ten fold greater than normal concrete. This led the researchers to propose this material for use in energy dissipation applications (Gong *et al*, 2004).

USDA Forest Products researchers have found that oxalic acid extraction and bioleaching with a metal-tolerant bacterium can successfully remove up to 78 percent of copper, 97 percent of arsenic and all chromium from CCA-treated pine, which can then be recovered for reuse or disposal. It is noted that this remediation is currently ‘cost prohibitive’, but could become financially viable if landfill restrictions are imposed (Clausen and Kenealy, 2004).

Researchers from the USDA Forest Service have developed a metal-tolerant wood decay fungi to degrade waste CCA-treated timber (Illman *et al*, 2004). This reduces the volume of waste rather than reusing it.

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