

UNREGULATED USE OF TOXIC WOOD PRESERVING CHEMICALS IN KENYA: HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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Abstract

Health, safety, and environmental contamination related to wood preservation and preservatives are issues in Kenya, as well as in other eastern and central African countries, that need to be addressed urgently. Substantial amounts of toxic chemicals used for wood preservation find their way into the environment in an unregulated manner. Wood treaters, consumers, the relevant authorities responsible for forest products or environmental health and safety, and the public, appear to be unaware of the risks that these chemicals represent due to the absence of information and regulations. Lack of appropriate training for plant operators and managers in matters relating to health, safety or the environment, and inadequate legislations to ensure protection of operatives and minimise environmental contamination, increase risks at treatment plants. Failure to properly inform timber users and the public on the risks that treated timbers represent further accentuates such risks. Appropriate techniques of conditioning and fixation are neither practiced nor enforced, resulting in reduced permanency and high leaching. The bulk of treated timbers are used in ground contact and risks of leaching into soils, watercourses and ground water are high. There are no policies or regulations to ensure that, when removed from service, treated timbers are properly and safely disposed of. Existing regulations are either too old or silent on wood treating chemicals. That situation has been allowed to persist for the past 50 years and there is an urgent need for immediate action. The four chemicals used in the country, CCA, Creosote, PCP and BFCA are known to be toxic, dangerous to human health and the environment, and need to be regulated more rigorously through appropriate policies, codes of good practices and legislations.

Key Words

Kenya, Africa, health, safety, environment, contamination, CCA, Creosote, PCP, BFCA, policies, legislations.