

Your health and Copper Chrome Arsenate (CCA) treated timber

May 2005

What is CCA treated timber?

CCA is a chemical preservative used to protect wood from pest infestations and rotting. Freshly treated CCA timbers can be identified by their yellow/greenish colour that fades over time.

Where is CCA timber found in the community?

CCA treated timbers have been used for over 30 years in outdoor applications. Outdoor structures made of CCA treated timber include playgrounds, decks and landscaping structures, as well as non-domestic building structures and uses such as posts and power poles.

What is happening to CCA timber use in Australia?

The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) is the agency responsible for registering chemical products to make sure they are safe to public health and the environment.

A recent APVMA review considered whether CCA treatments have an adverse impact on people and the environment, and in particular children who have frequent and close contact with structures made from CCA treated timber. The findings of this review were released in March 2005.

What did the APVMA recommend?

APVMA recommended changes to the facilities that make the chemical treatment, the circumstances in which CCA treated products can be used and labelling, and identification of the product.

As a precautionary measure, the APVMA recommended that CCA treated timber no longer be permitted in some applications and structures. From March 2006, CCA treated timber will no longer be permitted for use in building new garden furniture, picnic tables, exterior seating, children's play equipment, patios, domestic decking and handrails.

CCA treated timber is still permitted in other applications including power poles, fencing, some building structures, landscaping (eg. edging for garden beds).

The APVMA has not recommended the removal of existing structures built from CCA treated timber until the structures reach the end of their functional life. This decision is consistent with the approach of other countries including New Zealand, Europe and the United States.

Is it safe for children to play on play equipment built with CCA timber?

Yes. Over 30 years of use, no cases of adverse health effects in children playing on or near CCA treated play equipment have been reported.

Small amounts of arsenic are found in the environment, foods and drinking water and people can take this into the body without experiencing health effects. It has been suggested that arsenic may be swallowed by children playing on CCA treated timber by either licking their hands after touching the wood's surface, or eating the soil next to where the wood enters the ground.

The Commonwealth Health Department have stated 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*'.

Is hand washing enough after playing on equipment treated with CCA?

Yes. Good hygiene practices should always be followed any time a child plays outside. That is:

- Ensure children wash their hands after playing outside and especially before eating and drinking, and
- Ensure that food does not come into direct contact with any treated timber.

Should existing structures built with CCA timber be removed?

The APVMA has not recommended the removal of existing structures. There is no reason to remove or replace CCA-treated structures that are in good condition. This includes playground equipment.

Should existing structures be painted or sealed?

No. APVMA recommended that current 'information is limited on the possible benefits of painting treated-timber (including existing structures)'.

In what situations can CCA treated timber become a health issue?

Sawing or sanding CCA timbers produces dust. If you are doing this type of work wear protective equipment and make sure that sawdust or woodchips are cleaned up thoroughly and put in the bin.

Never burn CCA treated timber, sawdust or woodchips as hazardous fumes are released. In the event of a bushfire, residual ash should be cleaned up to prevent it being accidentally eaten by animals or young children (putting it in their mouths).

What precautions should be taken with CCA timber, woodchips, sawdust or ash?

- Always wear gloves, a facemask and eye protection when sawing or sanding CCA timber.
- Always dispose of sawdust, woodchips and left over wood in your council rubbish bin.
- Never burn CCA treated timber, sawdust or wood chips.

Are there alternative timber treatments that do not use arsenic?

There are arsenic-free alternative timber treatment products that are registered for use in Australia. These products control a similar range of pests. Ask your local hardware store about alternatives that are suitable for your intended project.

For further information on:

Arsenic and your health, contact the Department of Human Services (DHS) Environmental Health Unit on (03) 9637 4156.

The APVMA March 2005 Report go to <http://www.apvma.gov.au/chemrev/arsenic.shtml> , or the enHealth statement on health risks from CCA treated timber go to <http://enhealth.nphp.gov.au/>

CCA timber in:

- Childcare facilities or kindergartens, contact a DHS Children's Services Adviser in your region.
- Structures in your municipality, contact your local council Environmental Health Section.
- Schools, contact the Department of Education and Training on 9637-2000.
- Where to dispose of CCA timber contact the Environment Protection Authority Victoria on (03) 9695-2722.
- Applications that are still permitted after March 2006, contact the Department of Primary Industries Chemicals Standards Branch on (03) 9210-9379.