



Wood Preservation Expertise

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WOOD UTILITY POLES TREATED WITH CCA FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is CCA and why is it used to treat wood utility poles?

Chromated Copper Arsenate-Type C, commonly referred to as CCA, is a chemical formulation used as a wood preservative to treat wood utility poles to protect them from fungal decay and wood-destroying pests, including insects and microorganisms. The use of preservatives like CCA helps maintain the structural integrity of a pole and significantly increases the service life of a pole ensuring that fewer trees are harvested for replacement poles. An untreated wood pole has an expected service life of 4.5 years while a CCA treated pole has an expected service life well over 40 years.

How widespread is the use of CCA treated wood utility poles?

Of the more than 166 million wood utility poles in service in the United States, approximately 15-20% of the poles in service in the USA are CCA-treated (with the vast majority of the remaining percentage being treated with pentachlorophenol or creosote). Approximately 1.4 million new CCA treated poles are manufactured each year, representing approximately 40% of the poles manufactured each year. CCA treated wood poles provide reliable support for electrical and other utility services, such as cablevision, light standards, and telecommunications.

How are utility poles “treated” with CCA?

CCA treated wood poles are treated before they are put in service using vacuum-pressure treatment techniques. The poles are first kiln-dried and are then placed in large treatment vessels where a strong vacuum is applied. After this, a water-based CCA solution is added and the vessel is pressurized forcing the preservative solution deep into the sapwood of the pole. The poles are then allowed to dry before being placed in service. The foregoing processes, among other things, chemically “fix” the CCA to the wood.

What is the odor I smell near the recently installed CCA utility poles in my neighborhood? How long will the odor last?

Any odor you might smell may be from the refined oil emulsion (ET) used during the manufacturing process to make the pole more climbable. The odor is generally mild, if it exists at all, and will dissipate over time, typically well within the first few years of service. The odor may be more noticeable in warmer weather and less so in colder weather.

Are CCA treated utility poles regulated by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”)?

The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) authorizes EPA to review and register pesticides for specific uses. All pesticides distributed and sold in the United States must be registered by EPA based on scientific data showing that they will not cause unreasonable risks to human health, workers, or the environment when used as intended. CCA is a regulated pesticide containing Chromated Arsenicals registered for use as a wood preservative pesticide by EPA under FIFRA. EPA issued its most recent Chromated Arsenicals Reregistration Eligibility Decision (RED) in 2008, stating that, “EPA considered the available information and, after a thorough evaluation of the risks and benefits associated with each use, has determined that the wood preservative uses of chromated arsenicals ... will not pose unreasonable risks to humans or the environment” CCA’s use has been registered for over sixty years, first by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with which CCA was registered in the 1940s, and then by the EPA, which was created in 1970’s and took over the responsibility for pesticide regulation.

Will CCA from utility poles migrate into groundwater?

Because the CCA is chemically “fixed” to the wood any potential migration into groundwater is prevented or significantly hindered. Further, the scientific literature indicates that any small amounts of arsenic or chromium that might potentially migrate to groundwater are not expected to result in drinking water exposure because any metals that might be released from the treated wood tend to migrate to and bind to sediment, typically within 3 meters of the wood.

What should I do if I come into contact with a CCA treated wood pole?

Common sense care should be taken to limit prolonged skin contact with CCA treated poles, just as care should be taken to limit exposure to other products containing pesticides like household garden and insect sprays. Avoid prolonged direct contact with CCA treated wood poles and wash hands or other exposed areas thoroughly. (Consumer Information Sheet).

There is a CCA treated wood pole near my home. What should I do if my children play near the pole or in the soil around the base of the pole?

Utility poles are not intended as a child’s play area and as such children should be strongly discouraged from playing with or on utility poles. If children do come into contact with the wood, they should wash their hands or other contact areas thoroughly. (Consumer Information Sheet).

For more information, please go to <http://wooddoc.org/utills/utills.html>