



Preventing Arsenic Exposure from Pressure-Treated Wood: Recommendations for Action

Since the 1970's, arsenic has been widely used in pressure-treating wood for common outdoor structures such as playground equipment, backyard decks, picnic tables, park benches, fences, and landscaping timbers. Arsenic is linked to skin, bladder, and lung cancer as well as diabetes and a host of other health problems. Another name for wood that has been treated with arsenic is Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA)-treated wood.

Arsenic is known to leach to the surface of CCA-treated wood throughout the life of the product and can easily end up on the hands of anyone who touches the wood. Young children are at increased risk of cancer from arsenic exposure when they touch CCA-treated wood and then put their hands in their mouths. It can also be dangerous to anyone who does not know how to properly handle the wood. *Acute arsenic poisoning can result from sawing or sanding CCA-treated wood without the proper protective equipment or from burning this type of wood.*

The following are actions you can take to protect yourself and others around you:

- 1. Identify if arsenic is present in wood products or surrounding soils with a simple home test kit.** These easy-to-use test kits are available at www.safe2play.org or by calling 1-800-652-0827. Separate kits are available to test either the wood structures or the soil below at a cost of \$20 each. The test results will provide information on the estimated level of arsenic exposure risk from the particular wood surface or soil area tested.
- 2. When it is financially feasible to do so, the best long-term solution is to replace CCA lumber surfaces that have the potential for human contact.** There are various alternatives to CCA-treated wood available, and these should be considered, especially for children's play structures. Look for naturally rot-resistant wood that is sustainably harvested or reclaimed. In California, redwood is a readily available alternative to arsenic-treated lumber. Steel is also frequently used in place of CCA-treated wood products for public playground equipment. Composite lumber (a permanent melding of plastic and wood sawdust) is also an alternative.
- 3. If you are going to continue to use a CCA-treated wood structure, seal the wood at least once every year.** *Solid or semitransparent oil-based outdoor deck stains* are generally effective in containing the arsenic for about one and a half years. (The containment period may be shorter on lumber surfaces that receive extensive foot traffic or hand contact, such as play sets or decks.) After this eighteen-month time period, arsenic levels have often been found

to be greater than that of unsealed CCA lumber, so it is very important to reseal YEARLY. The California Health & Safety Code 115775 specifies that public play structures made of arsenic-treated wood must be sealed with non-toxic and non-slippery sealant at least every two years.

[Note: Regular lumber waterproofing agents are NOT recommended because they appear to be effective for only approximately four to six months.]

4. Take other simple steps to minimize risk of exposure.

- Thoroughly wash hands and avoid hand-to-mouth contact after touching CCA lumber.
- Don't allow children or pets to play in dirt around CCA structures, and don't store toys under CCA decking.
- Avoid eating vegetables grown in proximity to CCA lumber, and keep food away from CCA surfaces. Use a tablecloth on wood picnic tables.
- Due to the potential risk for acute arsenic poisoning, never pressure wash, sand, or burn CCA lumber!

5. Properly dispose of CCA-treated wood. Protect your community by bringing arsenic-treated wood to a hazardous waste disposal area or to a lined municipal landfill and request that it be stored and separated from recyclable lumber. Arsenic-treated wood disposed of at a regular landfill may be mistaken for untreated lumber and recycled into wood chips or mulch. See California Health & Safety Code 25150.7 and 25150.8 for information about state disposal laws. (Go to <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/calaw.html>)

To learn more about arsenic treated wood and how to protect yourself and your family, contact the Center for Environmental Health's Safe Playgrounds Project by our toll-free hotline at 1-800-652-0827 or by visiting our website, www.safe2play.org.

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