

## EWPAAs Media Release

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### Chinese non-compliant formply gets the chop on Sydney construction site

A SYDNEY unit development has been shut down by the NSW Work Cover Authority in a breakthrough test case against the use of imported non-compliant formply in building construction.

The action has followed an inspection of the construction site in the southern suburb of Sutherland by workplace inspectors from the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union (CFMEU), the largest and most powerful trade union representing Australian construction workers.

Alerted to reports that imported formply used at the site was structurally unsound, the state secretary of the CFMEU's NSW construction and general division Andrew Ferguson invited the Engineered Wood Products Association of Australasia (EWPAAs) to inspect the site and provide technical assessment to determine the source and grade of the formply material.

EWPAAs general manger Simon Dorries said industry had been aware for some time that sections of the building trade were using non-compliance imported formply, much of it sourced from China.

"We have been closely monitoring this but the condemned Sydney site is an eye-opening test case of just how serious the problem is," Mr Dorries said.

Reports confirm that Work Cover NSW will not allow any further pouring of concrete on the site until the formply is replaced with material that complies with the requirements of the Australian standard and is correctly labelled for stress grade.

In advice to WorkCover NSW, Mr Dorries reported that the formply used on the site demonstrated severe delamination, bowing and twisting, was unbranded and was without any structural rating. Samples of this product were selected and tested at the EWPAAs laboratory for bond quality and durability. These tests showed the plywood failed to meet any of the Australian Standards for bonding even including those for non-structural interior products.



On-site comparisons: In the Sutherland test case, the black material, which is EWPAAs certified, has performed well. The brown Chinese material has lifted and has delaminated.



Image shows severe delamination of the central glue line on the condemned formply at the Sydney construction site.

“If used in formwork, this plywood is likely to fail with potential serious consequences,” Mr Dorries said.

Andrew Ferguson said the Sutherland test case would have a big impact on the future trading and use of inferior imported plywood that failed structural standards in building construction.

“The use of this material and its threat to the lives of our members working on these sites is a major concern to the CFMEU,” Mr Ferguson said.

Mr Ferguson will work full time next month inspecting building sites to determine that formply used “is up to scratch”.

He said these inspections would be on-going using a trained four-person task force that would monitor and ‘police’ the use and quality of formply on building projects in New South Wales.

“We will call on the EWPA to give technical assistance where needed,” Mr Ferguson said.

The Sydney site closure underscores concerns by WorkCover NSW that “large quantities” of plywood are arriving in Australia without markings for structural strength.

Plywood is used as formwork in decking, soffits and walls/columns and is exposed to substantial forces. These are largely dead loads from the weight of reinforcing steel and concrete, and can be increased considerably by live loads such as those generated by persons working on the decking, plant used during the concrete pour, and wind loads. The plywood must be strong enough to withstand these forces.

The Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001 requires employers to ensure that formwork complies with AS 3610 Formwork for concrete. This standard specifies that plywood must comply with AS/NZS 2269 Structural plywood for structural properties and, depending on its type, either AS/NZS 2269 or AS/NZS 2271 plywood and blockboard for exterior use for its bond quality.

The regulation also states that components, including plywood used in the formwork assembly, must be of the specified type and material grade, and where they do not meet the criteria, they are to be rejected.

AS/NZS 2269 specifies testing requirements that are used to determine the strength, or “stress grade”, of the plywood, which is designated an ‘F-value’ – the higher the F-value, the stronger the plywood.

Typically, plywood used as formply has a stress-grade of F11 to F27, with F17 being the most common grade. The standard requires that each sheet of plywood be marked to indicate that it complies with the requirements of the standard and to show its stress grade.

Other recent case studies of some plywood imported into Australia found it had no markings to identify stress grade or compliance with the relevant Australian standard. Independent testing on samples of this plywood showed that it possessed properties equivalent to plywood with an F8 grade, and that the glue bond was not durable as it failed to meet the requirements of AS/NZS 2269 or AS/NZS 2271.



Simon Dorries: Non-compliance imported plywood is likely to fail with potential serious consequences.

“Suppliers of plywood claiming compliance with the relevant part of AS/NZS 2269 and/or AS/NZS 2271 must ensure that such claims can be authenticated,” Simon Dorries said.

“Each plywood sheet must be appropriately marked with the information required by the standard, including its stress grade. Consideration should be given to using a method of marking that is durable enough to enable the plywood be identified throughout its anticipated usage, including reuse.”

Plywood produced under the EWPAA quality stamp and the JAS-ANZ accredited product certification scheme provides reliable independent verification of product compliance.

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