

EWPA Media Release

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Federal body warns against use of high emission wood panel products

THE federal body responsible for the assessment and safe use of industrial chemicals has advised construction workers and wood panel users against the use of products that contain formaldehyde exceeding the low emission limits of E0 and E1.

Products meeting E0 and E1 are considered safe in all applications including indoor and poorly ventilated applications.

A new report by the Australian Government's National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS) has detailed the potential health hazards associated with formaldehyde exposure from pressed wood products that fail to meet low emission standards.

"This notice is very comforting for the wood processing industry that for many years has battled against market-damaging high emission imported products such as flat panel products that do not meet Australia's low emission standards," the general manger of the Engineered Wood Products Association of Australasia Simon Dorries said.

"Independent routine testing of imported panels purchased in the open market for formaldehyde emissions has shown a disturbing failure rate when compared to acceptable low emission limits but, more importantly, product is seldom branded to identify to the consumer low and high emission product as required by Australian Standards. Furthermore, some of the labeling claims which identify product as low emission are highly questionable.

Mr Dorries said the EWPA strictly maintained JAS-ANZ accredited certification schemes that guaranteed its members' factories complied with the Australian standards on low formaldehyde levels. The EWPA carries out regular laboratory tests in its NATA accredited laboratories for formaldehyde emissions from all certified products manufactured in the Australasian region.

The construction industry and users of wood components have been notified to refer to the NICNAS material safety data sheet before purchasing any pressed wood products. The Information Sheet No 30 issued in September, refers to Australian standards, labelling and product certification information available from the EWPA.

Pressed wood products are sheet materials in which wood is largely in the form of strips, veneers, chips, strands or fibres. The wood particles are bound together by glue which is commonly a formaldehyde-based resin.

NICNAS has identified pressed wood products as plywood for panelling, furniture and other products; particleboard for shelving, countertops, floor underlay, furniture and some laminated flooring; and medium density fiberboard (MDF) used for cabinets, furniture, doors and laminated flooring.

Pressed wood products are used in the construction of furniture, kitchens and flooring and are commonly used in caravans, mobile homes and demountable buildings.

The current national occupational exposure standard for formaldehyde is 1 ppm 8-hour time weighted average (TWA) and 2 ppm short-term exposure limit (STEL).

The NICNAS report recommends that the occupational exposure standard be lowered to 0.3 ppm TWA and 0.6 STEL, based on irritation of the eyes and nose.

The Safe Work Australia Council, the agency responsible for setting national occupational exposure standards, is considering the recommended standard.

The EWPAA maintains two NATA-accredited laboratories to test for formaldehyde emissions. Formaldehyde emissions for all EWPAA certified products are tested on a monthly basis. The schemes are accredited by the Joint Accreditation System of Australian and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ).

The average formaldehyde emission for all structural and Type A exterior plywood products produced by EWPAA certified mills is only 0.14mg/L or one-third the permitted level for E0 and approximate to the natural formaldehyde emission from timber.

Further information:

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