
Letters



Ant Remedies

To the Editor:

I recommend the author of the article "Carpenter Ants and Foam Core Panels" (JLC, 4/89) plant tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), two plants on each side of the house. Ants hate it. To repair your house, infrared scan the damage. Drill holes at the following spacing: depth of foam times six or seven, then refoam with water-based urethane. Plug the 1/4-inch holes with appropriate finish material and relax. We built stressed-skin homes (expanded polystyrene), which were badly infested five years ago. Hence we switched to Cedarfoam, which has performed for five field years with no infiltration so far.

We use shiplap for the panel joint, which is simple and fast. We are against "structural" panel systems because of moisture, rot, and instability in a fire.

Cricket Smith-Gary
Remarc, Inc.
Holderness, N.H.

Editor's Note: Cedarfoam panels were developed by Remarc, Inc., to address the ant problem. The panels have an extract of cedar oil blended into the polystyrene foam cores. The panels are only available to builder/dealers trained and certified by Remarc.

PT Wood Seems Unsafe

To the Editor:

The subject of pressure-treated wood again rears its ugly head. The article by Scott Grove in your June issue has me concerned.

Readers in the past have expressed views concerning CCA (chromated copper arsenate) treated wood products, linking them to possible health problems. EPA recommends that CCA-treated wood products not come in contact with food, and therefore it should not be used for cutting boards or countertops. Yet here Mr. Grove depicts how cleverly he circumvents this warning and inlays a small section of Corian into what is essentially an outdoor countertop. Apparently he does not realize that foodstuffs will not confine themselves to this little square foot of non-toxic surface, especially if there are children around.

According to industry-sponsored research, after CCA enters the wood, it forms precipitates, supposedly highly resistant to leaching. EPA seems to concur, and concludes from its own study that "CCA does not pose an unreasonable risk." Even so, EPA goes on to recommend gloves when handling the wood, a mask if you are around wood dust, and washing your hands before eating. Doesn't sound too safe to me, nor I suspect, would it be comforting to parents of children who play on structures built of PT lumber.

Are we to assume that the cautious

approach to handling these materials during construction should be ignored the day the builder drives off? Should we be washing our hands or wearing gloves while having dinner on the deck?

As a carpenter, I repeatedly have come in contact with CCA products and have noticed effects from breathing the sawdust. I now wear OSHA-approved breathing masks when cutting or sanding.

On the front cover of your magazine, no less, is a photo depicting a carpenter with no mask (his and the company's problem), and in the rear, a one foot high pile of sawdust beneath the saw (owner's problem).

EPA is not known for being overly stringent with industry. Products like DDT, Chlordane, asbestos and hundreds of others have been allowed to be used in inappropriate situations for years before it is "discovered" that they present undue hazards (or when lawsuits start piling up against the manufacturers).

In conclusion, contractors should use CCA-treated products judiciously and with practical safety procedures.

Joseph Petrarca
East Calais, Vt.

Caulk for Stained Siding

To the Editor:

I was surprised that William Lotz didn't mention the rough-sawn redwood and cedar sidings used in the Rocky Mountains and West in his article "Flash and Caulk" (JLC, Case In Point, 5/89). We use sealers and/or stains, which obviously are over raw wood and not primed.

Common caulks bleed into the wood and prevent penetration of stains. Urethane caulks are the proper answer. Rexnord and Sikaflex are two brands I commonly use.

Maurice Kemp
Denver, Colo.

Good Management Skills

To the Editor:

I enjoyed Dan Marrazzo's article, "The Care & Feeding of Company Personnel" (JLC In Business, 4/89). It has been my experience that an informed and intelligent management approach is the exception in the building industry today, with too many builders relying on tyranny of authority and what management expert Tom Peters refers to as the kick-in-the-backside (KITA) approach.

I wholeheartedly agree that long-term company goals and respect for the labor force are two vital areas that anyone in a management position needs to address, although the title of Mr. Marrazzo's article seemed to belie his commitment to the latter.

A few of the areas he covered represent a bone of contention for me, and

I feel they're part of the current mythology beclouding this much neglected art.

First is his statement that "a commanding knowledge of the entire job is extremely important for the manager who directs the crew." Unfortunately, it seems most managers have unflagging confidence in their own commanding knowledge and experience. And they further tend to believe (as Mr. Marrazzo implies) that their crew will lack respect for them if they don't project this self-confidence at every turn.

I submit that a working knowledge of basic management skills (organizing, communicating, commending, delegating, etc.), coupled with an analytical approach to any problems that arise, will put you miles ahead of the builder who relies heavily on his own knowledge and experience. The reason is simple: The skilled manager draws from the cumulative knowledge and skill of the entire crew which will always surpass the vision of any one person.

The second point I would like to address is the matter of the "company fishing trip or ballgame" being touted as a means of building "team spirit." A team spirit is derived from working together as a team to accomplish some mutual goal that each member believes in. As in sports, the team functions best when each individual has a clearly defined set of objectives, and is respected for his or her ability to contribute to the overall team effort.

At any rate, it's good to see a thoughtful approach to this aspect of personnel management presented in your journal. After all, a motivated employee is the builder's greatest asset.

Neal Bahrman
Ventura, Calif.

Trouble With Attached Garages

To the Editor:

At the end of his article on garages (JLC Building With Style, 7/89), Gordon Tully wonders why attached garages are almost a requirement of modern living. If, in fact, they are, it is an unfortunate trend. Like with many things that surround us, we rarely analyze all their implications. Attached garages are no exception.

An attached garage not only houses the family car, but also a lawnmower, and any number of cans of gasoline, paint, insecticides, cleaning solvents, etc. All of these products emit harmful vapors and gases, which eventually seep into the living space of the house. Attached garages are, in fact, unhealthy. At the very least, they should be separated from the house by a breezeway, but odors can still enter the house via connected attics.

Imagine a house with an attached garage located underneath second-story bedrooms. You pull a hot automobile into the garage and shut the door. As the car cools down the fumes seep into the bedrooms, the rooms in which we spend eight hours a day. Such a garage at least should have an exhaust fan, but detached garages are still healthier.

John Bower
Unionville, Ind.

Consider Other Wood Species

To the Editor:

I enjoyed Scott Grove's article on outdoor deck construction, "All Decked Out" (JLC, 6/89). However, he missed something when he talked about lumber choices. Treated southern yellow pine is not the only alternative.

Both redwood and western red cedar are growing in popularity and availability in the Northeast. The heartwood of both woods is naturally decay-resistant, and so can be used without additional preservative treatment. Each is richly colored and straight-grained, and is sold in a range of grades and dimensions. The Western Wood Products Association recently published grade rules for 5/4 radius-edged decking much like those published by the Southern Pine Inspection Bureau. Your readers might wish to ask about these when comparing lumber choices.

In addition, there are specialty woods including Port Orford cedar, Alaska yellow cedar, and treated ponderosa pine. The former two are light-colored cedars that lend themselves well to decks. But they might be difficult to locate. Ponderosa pine treats as well as southern yellow pine, and is used quite a bit in the West and Midwest, but infrequently in the Northeast. The search for these materials might prove rewarding.

Builders who work with cedar and redwood often use southern pine for the understructure of the deck, and reserve the western wood for the exposed surfaces. This seems to me to be a good way to take advantage of the best characteristics of each.

Chris Donnelly
Northford, Conn.



Keep 'em coming. We welcome letters, but they must be signed and include the writer's address. *The Journal of Light Construction* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail letters to *The Journal*, RR 2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.