GAF Shutters DuraLife Factories

Just four years after venturing into the decking industry, GAF Materials Corp. is pulling out of it. At the end of August, the company ceased all production at its Biddeford, Maine, and Lenexa, Kan., manufacturing facilities.

Best known for its $3 billion roofing and ventilation business, GAF first got involved with decking in 2007 when it purchased ElkCorp and the Cross Timbers brand. Then in 2009, it acquired Correct Building Products, maker of CorrectDeck CX, a polypropylene (PP) and wood composite. And last year, it added a rice hull–polyethylene composite to its offerings and launched a campaign rebranding all its deck, porch, dock, and railing products as "DuraLife." In the case of CorrectDeck CX, renamed DuraLife Siesta, GAF made it clear that the product itself was the same, even though it had a new name.

Alyssa Hall, marketing communications manager at GAF, said that the new DuraLife Siesta Hardwood line was so popular, it sold out. But, she said, "with the difficult economic environment, in terms of an investment, it [the decking business] wasn't bringing in enough." The company will continue to sell product that has already been manufactured, and warranties will remain in place. "Of course," she said, "we will not be signing up new members to the Certified Contractor Program."

Hall did not know whether there were any potential buyers lined up to acquire the decking assets.

Shane O'Neill, chief technology officer of Compositology, a consulting firm focused on composite products, listed some of the attributes of DuraLife Siesta that would make its technology an attractive purchase: "the longest market run of a cap, longest hidden fastener system, PP-based, anti-microbial additive, and mechanically as stiff as all heck."

O'Neill went on to say that "the Lenexa facility is heavily automated and would be a nice addition to any manufacturers currently looking at expanding their production capacity." However, he added, "Unfortunately, with the dismal building market, I do not think anyone is looking at expanding capacity." — *Laurie Elden*

EPA Backs Off Lab Testing for Lead

To the relief of remodelers who work on pre-1978 housing, the EPA announced in July that it will not require remodelers to send dust samples to an accredited lab for lead testing at the completion of a renovation project.

The announcement came as somewhat of a surprise. On May 6, 2010, as part of an August 2009 legal settlement with environmental and children's-health advocacy groups, the EPA had proposed a revision to the Lead: Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) rule that would have required this testing. The agency was widely expected to adopt the requirement when the proposal's review period ended and the final rule was released on July 15, 2011.

Instead, the agency determined that third-party lead testing was not necessary and "that the full suite of RRP work practice requirements, including containment, cleaning, and cleaning verification, was effective at minimizing exposure to lead-based paint hazards created by renovation, repair, and painting activities."

The agency explained that it had weighed concerns that by requiring clearance testing, it would in effect be making remodelers responsible for cleaning up pre-existing lead contamination. The RRP rule was designed, according to the EPA, "to address the lead-based paint hazards created during the renovation while not requiring renovation firms to remediate or eliminate hazards beyond the scope of the work they were hired to do." The EPA decided that adding clearance requirements to the RRP rule would cross a line between renovation and lead abatement.

The EPA emphasized that it is committed to reducing lead hazards in the home, and that homeowners may certainly opt for dust-wipe testing, whether they are renovating or not. To get the word out, the agency has released a new version of its "Renovate Right" pamphlet that includes information on lead-dust testing (epa.gov/lead).

Once the final rule goes into effect on October 4, remodelers will be required to provide homeowners with this latest version of the "Renovate Right" pamphlet (or the April 2010 version along with the insert that can be found at epa.gov/lead/pubs/insert.pdf).

The final rule also clarifies that vertical containment must be used on exterior projects that disturb painted surfaces within 10 feet of a property line. — *L.E.*

DECKING NEWS

Second quarter sales were down 24 percent from the same period last year, Advanced Environmental Recycling Technologies (AERT) reported in August. The Springdale, Ark., company's CEO, Joe G. Brooks, attributed the decrease to supplier BlueLinx's reducing its inventory of the ChoiceDek brand and noted that "consumer demand is on par with last year." Sales of MoistureShield products, AERT's pro line, were up slightly.

Trex, too, reported slower sales in the second quarter; its sales were down 32 percent from the same period last year. CEO Ronald W. Kaplan attributed some of the decline in sales to the economy, but most of it to poor weather conditions: "The severe winter storms that impacted many parts of the U.S. through April were followed by heavier-than-normal precipitation during most of May, delaying the start of the deck-building season and negatively affecting the sell-through of our products." He went on to note that sales increased in June and July and were higher than in the same months last year.

Poor decking sales also impacted Universal Forest Products' second quarter earnings. Sales of its retail building materials decreased 18.6 percent from the same period last year, and the company noted in its earnings report that homeowners were holding off on more-expensive projects like decks and fences until the economy picked up. The company also noted that 2010 results may have been artificially high because of the home-buyer tax credit, thereby exaggerating this year's drop.

Missed the class on curves? A free feature at Radius Track's website, www.radiustrack.com, makes it easy to figure out how many linear feet of material you'll need to wrap around a curved deck. Just mouse over the "support center" option on the top menu and select "radius calculator." Then, enter any two of the following three measurements: arc radius, chord height, chord length (a labeled drawing helps those who have forgotten their geometry). The calculator will determine the arc length (the linear footage you'll need).

DeckLok brackets are back. They're now being sold by Gig Harbor, Wash.-based Screw Products, which acquired the assets of the financially troubled DeckLok on June 1. DeckLok was originally founded by Michael Morse, the inventor of the DeckLok Bracket System, and James Miller, the owner and president of Screw Products.

Fiber is good for decks, too. ICC Evaluation Service issued an evaluation report in July for Natures Composites TerraDeck solid-profile composite deck boards. The report, ESR-3176, allows the polyethylene and wheat-fiber composite TerraDeck "to be used as an alternative to preservative-treated or naturally durable lumber on exterior decks, porches, balconies, or stair treads, as applicable." The maximum span rating is 16 inches on-center for the deck boards, and the maximum stair-tread span is 10 inches. TerraDeck is produced in Torrington, Wyo.

Plastic docks are giving jellyfish a place to call home. Because it doesn't leach chemicals into the water, plastic lumber is often used instead of treated wood on docks located in sensitive aquatic environments. In at least one location, however, its nontoxicity has created its own problem: a friendly spot for aquatic pests to live and breed. Montclair State University biology professor Paul Bologna, who studies stinging sea nettles in New Jersey's Barnegat Bay, told *PDB* that their population has "exploded" in New Jersey in the last five years. In addition to other factors, like warming water temperatures and changes in local ecology, one unanticipated cause of the rise of the stinging sea nettle has been the substitution of plastic for treated lumber. "The goal was to get rid of creosote and arsenic and other toxic chemicals leaching into the water," Bologna said. "The inadvertent result is that these guys really like the plastic. It gives them a place to settle."

ModernView Decking is a new product manufactured by Advanced Environmental Recycling Technologies (AERT) and sold exclusively by independent lumberyards to professional builders. Like AERT's MoistureShield, ModernView is a composite of wood fibers encapsulated in polyethylene plastic; also like MoistureShield, it contains 95 percent recycled materials and can qualify for LEED points. In ModernView's actual formulation, though, smaller fibers are used. And in appearance, the color palette is different and the boards are narrower (1x5 instead of 1x5½). The ModernView brand is a private label owned by Lumbermens Merchandising Corp., a network of independent lumberyards originally set up in 1935 as a buying cooperative to acquire more competitive pricing. Since then, its membership has grown from 35 companies to more than 365 stockholders, with an annual sales volume exceeding $2 billion. ❖