



North American Wood Pole Council

Statement on the use of penta-treated wood utility poles:

The North American Wood Pole Council (NAWPC), representing wood utility pole manufacturers in North America, would like to address recent statements on the use of pentachlorophenol, or penta, treated wood poles.

Millions of utility poles preserved with penta have been used throughout the United States for more than 80 years. Over this long history of use, there have been no documented incidents of harm or illness to any individual caused by casual contact with penta-treated utility poles. This history tells the clear, unmistakable story: Penta-treated poles have been and can be used safely.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates all wood preservatives, including pentachlorophenol, under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). The standards for safety that must be met to earn a FIFRA registration are exceedingly high. The EPA notes: "These pesticides must be supported with a complete scientific analysis and show that they can be used without causing unreasonable adverse effects to human health or the environment."

The EPA's toxicological review for pentachlorophenol lasted more than a decade and required millions of dollars in testing and research to provide EPA with sound, scientific data on penta's potential threat to human health and the environment. This process was completed in 2008, and the EPA registration of pentachlorophenol as a wood preservative was re-affirmed (http://www3.epa.gov/pesticides/chem_search/reg_actions/reregistration/red_PC-063001_25-Sep-08.pdf).

Had there been any unreasonable risk to human health or the environment, the EPA would not have approved the re-registration. The EPA has confirmed that casual contact with the preservative does not pose an unreasonable risk to human health.

The amount of penta contained in a utility pole is small. As a preservative, penta provides an effective barrier to threats from termites and decay fungi.

Using concrete or steel utility poles instead of penta-treated poles is not without potential impacts to the environment or human health. Life cycle analysis show production of concrete and steel poles have significantly higher impacts on the environment in generating greenhouse gasses, acid rain and ecotoxic air emissions as well as increased fossil fuel use.

A ban on the use of pentachlorophenol advocated by European countries is just the most recent examples of decisions made due to political and national interests instead of actual science. Many of these nations also ban substances such as fluoride and food additives that are approved, used and consumed in the U.S. daily.

There is no health science to support a ban on the use of penta to treat utility poles. Instead of improving public health, banning the use of penta for utility poles would simply result in a huge cost increases to utilities and ratepayers. It would eliminate a cost-effective, sustainable and environmentally friendly product that has record of safe and effective use spanning more than eight decades.