



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 wood poles treated with pentachlorophenol, or penta.

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 receive 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 conducts ongoing toxicological reviews for pentachlorophenol, requiring millions of dollars in testing and research to provide EPA with sound, scientific data on penta's potential impact to human health and the environment. The EPA completed a full public review of the use of penta in 2008, and the EPA registration of pentachlorophenol as a wood preservative was re-affirmed (http://www.epa.gov/oppsrrd1/REDs/pentachlorophenol_red.pdf).

Had there been any unreasonable risk to human health or the environment, the EPA would not have approved the re-registration of penta. The EPA's reaffirmation of penta confirms that casual contact with wood poles treated with the preservative does not pose an unreasonable risk to human health or the environment.

The amount of penta contained in a utility pole is very small, representing less than 1 percent of the weight of the pole. As a preservative, penta provides an effective barrier to threats from termites and decay fungi. Properly maintained penta-treated utility poles typically have a service life in excess of 50 years, with some poles still in service today after 70-plus years. This extended service life contributes to treated wood poles being a sustainable choice, as a new tree can be planted and grow to a usable length before the existing pole must be replaced.

Using concrete or steel utility poles or burying the lines underground instead of using 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 gases, 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 example of decisions which are driven by political and national interests rather than actual science. The questionable science used in a recent Stockholm Convention ban was challenged by both the United States and Canadian governments. Many of the nations that voted against the use of penta also restrict substances such as fluoride and food additives that are approved, used and consumed in the U.S. daily without any demonstrated impacts on public health.

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