



North American Wood Pole Council

Statement on the US EPA proposed cancellation of pentachlorophenol wood preservative:

The North American Wood Pole Council (NAWPC), representing wood utility pole manufacturers in North America, would like to address the U.S. EPA Proposed Interim Decision (PID) for the re-registration of pentachlorophenol, or penta. The EPA is proposing the cancellation and phase-out of all registered products containing penta, including wood utility poles.

Millions of utility poles preserved with penta have been in service 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 individuals or linemen 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 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. The 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." This has not changed for penta. In its proposed cancellation, the EPA did not cite any harm from incidental human contact or the environment. What has changed is that the sole supplier of penta, KMG-Bernuth, Inc., a CMC Materials company, is planning to cease production of penta at the end of this year. This was announced in 2019.

Penta is being discontinued due to changing market conditions, not government regulation. The wood preserving industry will work with the EPA and KMG to ensure there is sufficient time for the phase out to allow for treaters to use up their penta inventories and switch over their production to alternative preservatives

There is no concern for penta-treated utility poles in service and there is no recommendation to remove or stop installing such poles from inventory. As penta is phased out, the wood preserving industry will be able to meet demands for wood poles with alternatives preservatives.

Replacing preserved wood poles with concrete or steel utility 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.

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