



The Safe Playgrounds Project

A project of the Center for Environmental Health



What you should know about arsenic-treated wood

Who should be concerned? Parents, caregivers, school administrators and staff, childcare providers, park and recreation staff as well as public officials

Arsenic-treated wood has been used to build many outdoor structures such as decks, picnic tables and play equipment. Chromated-copper arsenate (CCA) was widely used over the last thirty years as an insecticide and preservative in pressure-treating wood for outdoor structures. Of the 3 chemicals (arsenic, copper and chromium), arsenic is considered the most toxic.

Arsenic causes cancer and other serious health risks. Arsenic is a far more potent skin, bladder, and lung carcinogen than previously thought. It is also linked to suppression of the immune system, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

Young children are most at risk. Over time, arsenic continues to be released



from the surface of the treated wood and into nearby soil.

Children who play on CCA-treated play sets pick up arsenic-residue on their hands and can swallow the arsenic when they put their hands in their mouths. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

concluded that children who come into repeated contact with CCA-treated wood surfaces may have a significantly higher risk of developing cancer.¹

Use of CCA wood is being phased out, but children are still at risk. As of January 1, 2004, the EPA and the wood products industry agreed to stop the manufacture of CCA-treated wood for most residential uses. However, children are still coming into contact with the many existing CCA structures in use, so public education campaigns like the Center for Environmental Health's Safe Playgrounds Project are being launched to inform citizens how to minimize risk.

The safest action one can take is to completely replace the CCA wood structure (as well as the soil below). If this is not possible, prioritize replacing the sections with the most human contact (such as handrails or steps) and seal the CCA wood regularly. For public play sets made of CCA wood, regular sealing is required by California law.

¹ "A Probabilistic Risk Assessment for Children Who Contact CCA-treated Playsets and Decks." US EPA

IS YOUR PUBLIC PLAYGROUND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE CALIFORNIA STATE SEALANT LAW?



The California Health and Safety Code 115775 requires CCA-treated playground equipment purchased by the state to be sealed with a non-toxic and non-slippery sealant every 2 years.

Do you know if your wood is CCA-treated? The first step is to use a simple home test kit (which is available for \$20) to identify if a play structure is made of CCA wood and/or to determine the potential arsenic exposure levels from a particular lumber surface, or in the soil below. Wood testing kits and soil testing kits can be ordered through the Safe Playgrounds Project at www.safe2play.org.

Suggested replacement materials to CCA-treated wood include sustainably-harvested, naturally rot-resistant woods (e.g. redwood and cedar), or composite lumbers, concrete, metal, or plastics (but not PVC/polyvinyl chloride). Alternative treated wood products that are less toxic than CCA include ACQ (ammoniacal copper quaternary) or CBA (copper boron azole) which require stainless steel or hot-dipped galvanized nails or fasteners.

For existing CCA play structures, the best recommendation at this time is to initially use two coats of semi-transparent oil-based deck stains (with enough color to detect wear) and to reseal at least every year.

****More detailed information can be found at www.safe2play.org****

- Make sure children wash their hands after touching CCA lumber and avoid hand-to-mouth contact while playing on CCA lumber.
- Keep children away from dirt or wood chips around CCA structures and do *not* place gardens or grow vegetables in proximity to CCA wood. Thoroughly stain your own CCA wood picnic tables and be sure to cover public CCA wood picnic tables with a tablecloth to avoid contact with food.
- When preparing and cleaning CCA wood surfaces, use a soap and water solution with disposable cleaning supplies. **Avoid** power washing and *never* sand or cut CCA wood without the proper protective gear as this will release dangerous arsenic-laden dust. Also *avoid* acid-based or highly oxidizing cleaners or deck brighteners. *Never* burn CCA wood and do *not* use it for mulch or wood chips.

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