



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

