



**SOME COMMON FALLACIES ABOUT WOOD**

BY  
Forest Products Laboratory,  
Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
*One of A Series*

FALLACY 1—That all wood in the course of time "naturally" decays as a result of age.

This fatalistic concept ignores the true cause of decay and may lead the user to neglect the proper precautions against it. Time or age itself has nothing to do with the decay of wood. The White House, when remodeled in 1949, was found to contain sound timbers that had been in place since 1816. The Fairbanks house, a wood structure in Dedham, Mass., is standing structurally intact after three centuries. Timbers several hundred years old have been recovered from the ruins of Indian pueblos in Arizona and New Mexico.

A part of a Roman emperor's house-boat that sank long ago in Lake Nemi was sound enough after nearly 2,000 to be identified by the Forest Products Laboratory as spruce. A log 7 feet in diameter was found some years ago in a tunnel being dug 150 feet below the bed of the Yakima River in Washington. A piece of it was sent to the Forest Products Laboratory and the wood was identified as an extinct species of sequoia, of an age estimated by geologists as 12 million years.

During the progress of the thousands or perhaps millions of years wood constantly immersed in water or wet soil gradually undergoes chemical changes (not to be confused with true decay) that result in a loss of some of the original strength. This millennial process that involves only immersed wood, however, has no practical significance for current structures.

These examples prove that wood does not necessarily decay with age at all. Decay is the result of one thing only, and that is the attack of wood-destroying fungi. In the cases mentioned

the wood had been kept free of fungus attack in two ways: it had been kept dry, as in weatherproof structures or in a dry climate, or it had been kept thoroughly and permanently saturated. A fungus is a plant. If the wood is too dry for it to grow and spread, decay does not occur. If the wood is thoroughly saturated, the fungus is then "drowned out." The range of activity of fungi lies between 20 percent moisture content of the wood and a "soaking wet" condition in which all air is excluded.



To the Albert Claytons, came a girl on the 22nd; the John Whites, a boy on the same day; and a boy to the Allen Slatons on the 26th. These were all reported by Dr. Ronniger's office.

**Plan For Timber Payroll Increase In 10 Years**

Oregon's billion dollar timber industry will flourish under a 25 percent payroll increase within the next 10 years, Governor Elmo Smith recently predicted in a speech before the West Coast Lumbermen's association.

Governor Smith said that improved utilization of timber and wood wastes is bringing about a new pattern which may well determine the industrial future of the northwest for the next half century. He forecasts an increase of 25,000 jobs in the industry which now employs at least 100,000 persons.

"This can be done without increasing the use of virgin raw material," Governor Smith explained. "It can be done by an expansion of the pulp and paper, hardboard, wood fabricating and re-manufacturing industries."

"Any consideration of Oregon's long-range future without giving full study to the part the forest products industry will play would be an empty gesture," the

governor added. This new pattern of industrial growth in Oregon started several years ago when pulp companies suddenly discovered vast quantities of left-over wood virtually on their doorsteps, the governor explained. It is estimated today that two billion board feet of once wasted or poorly used wood now brings back returns to sawmills.

As to the possibilities for wood use in the future, Gov. Smith cited a recent survey in Lane county where it was found that sawmill left-overs, scarcely used except for fuel, added up to a staggering estimated woodpile of that one county alone.

The West Coast Lumbermen's association was praised by Governor Smith for its long record of leadership in forestry, "lumber promotion and public service."

Governor Smith said the state of Oregon as a silent partner in all forest products industries has certain obligations, toward assuring an honest and just tax structure, encouraging friendly relations between employers and employees, encouraging perpetual cropping of forest lands, and stepping up the forest research program, to develop more by-products from wood.

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