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Fact Sheet: Arsenic Treated Wood

Department of Health and Human Services
11 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Maine CDC
Environmental and Occupational Health Program
Toll Free in Maine: 866-292-3474
Fax: 207-287-3981
TTY: 207-287-8066
Email: ehu@maine.gov

IF YOU WORK WITH CCA WOOD

- **NEVER** burn CCA wood.
- Wear gloves when handling CCA wood
- Wear a dust mask when sanding or cutting CCA wood
- Don't work with CCA wood in an enclosed area (like a garage)

Apply a coating to seal the wood every 1-2 years

TO LEARN MORE

Eric Frohmberg
Environmental and Occupational Health Program
Maine CDC
Toll-free in Maine 866-292-3474
TTY: 207-287-8066
www.maine.gov/dhhs/eohp

Does Your New Home Have Arsenic (CCA) Treated Wood?

About half of all Maine homes have a deck, or playground or some other structure that is made of wood treated with arsenic. This wood is called "CCA pressure-treated wood" or just "pressure-treated" wood. The wood was treated with arsenic to protect against rot and insects.

Too much arsenic can cause cancer. So it is good to prevent arsenic getting into your body when you can. When you touch wood treated with arsenic, you can get arsenic on your hands. The arsenic on your hands can get into your mouth if you are not careful about washing before eating. Young children are most at risk because they are more likely to put their hands in their mouths. The good news is that there are simple things you can do to protect yourself and your family from arsenic treated wood. This fact sheet will tell you how.



Children touching unsealed treated wood, and then putting their hands in their mouths is the biggest concern.

First: Does your house have arsenic treated (CCA) wood?

When arsenic treated wood is new, it tends to have a greenish tint. When CCA wood is older, it is harder to tell. Ask your realtor if the seller knows whether CCA wood was used. You can also test the wood to find out if it contains arsenic. Call us to find out how.

Second: If so, reduce contact with the arsenic.

You can lower the amount of arsenic on the surface of the wood by applying a coating on the wood every 1-2 years. Oil-based sealants, varnishes, or polyurethane work best for sealing arsenic in the wood. Be sure to wash your children's hands when they finish playing on or near CCA wood.

Third: If you have any questions, call us toll-free in Maine: 866-292-3474

Common Questions

What is CCA wood?

CCA wood is made by dipping the wood in a mixture of chemicals. These chemicals include chromium, copper, and arsenic. This protects the wood against insects and rot. This wood is known as CCA wood or "pressure treated" wood. Most pressure treated wood in the U.S. is CCA wood. After December 31, 2003, no more CCA wood will be made for use around homes. CCA wood may still be sold for home use until April 1, 2004 in the state of Maine.

What is Arsenic?

Arsenic is found in soil and rocks. Most people get a little arsenic every day from the food they eat. Also, some people have arsenic in their private wells, which is why it is important that anyone with a well have it tested for arsenic. People who are exposed to too much arsenic over many years are more likely to get cancer.

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Have you tested your well water for arsenic?



Your water looks, smells and tastes fine. So why do you need to test it?

It is hard to believe that water that looks, smells and tastes fine may not be safe to drink. But the truth is that 1 in 10 wells in Maine has water that is high in arsenic. There are wells high in arsenic in all parts of Maine.

Protect your family. Test your well for arsenic every 3 to 5 years.

How to Test Your Well Water

1. Call a lab.

- Call a certified lab and ask for an arsenic test kit for your well water. You can find a lab at this website: wellwater.maine.gov. Or call the Maine Lab Certification Officer at 207-287-1929.
- If you have never tested your well water for bacteria, nitrites and nitrates, or other chemicals like radon, uranium and flouride, ask your lab for a test kit for all of these.

2. Do the test.

- Your test kit will arrive in the mail. It will have empty bottles, directions and forms to fill out.
- Follow the directions and mail the bottles back to the lab with the forms.

3. Get your results.

- Your test results will come to you in the mail.
- If you have too much arsenic in your water, or if you are not sure you understand your test results, call 866-292-3474 (toll-free in Maine) or 207-287-4311 to speak to an expert.

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Why Arsenic is Bad

People who drink water with too much arsenic for many years are more likely to get cancer. Arsenic can cause skin, bladder and lung cancers.

It may cause low birthweight and affect brain development in babies if pregnant women drink water with too much arsenic in it. Arsenic can also affect brain development in young children. Other problems from drinking water with very high arsenic levels include: stomach pain, nausea, diarrhea, numbness or tingling in the hands and feet and changes in skin.

Your chance of having any of these health problems depends on:

- how much arsenic is in your water;
- how much water you drink;
- how long you have been drinking the water.

Solving Arsenic Problems

There are actions you can take to protect your family if your water has too much arsenic. First, you can switch to bottled water for drinking and making drinks. This will allow you time to decide if you want to install a water treatment system.

Call us at 866-292-3474 (toll-free in Maine) or 207-287-4311 if you have high arsenic. We can help you decide how to solve the problem.

Protect your family. Test your well.

- For more information: wellwater.maine.gov
- Call for advice: **866-292-3474 • TTY: Call Maine Relay 711**

March 2020

Century21 North East, 251 US Route 1 Falmouth ME 04105 Phone: **2078359542** Fax: **Mike Doyle**
Danielle Read
Produced with Lone Wolf Transactions (zipForm Edition) 717 N Harwood St, Suite 2200, Dallas, TX 75201 www.lwolf.com