

Columbia Forest Products Earns CARB Exemption For PureBond® Veneer Core Hardwood Plywood Testing First Domestic Plywood To Achieve Exempt Status In NAF Category

Greensboro, NC – Columbia Forest Products, North America’s largest manufacturer of hardwood plywood and veneer, has received written approval from the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to be exempted from routine formaldehyde emissions testing for its veneer core hardwood plywood products produced with soy-based PureBond® formaldehyde-free resin technology.

The exemption was granted in the NAF (No Added Formaldehyde) resin category.

This makes PureBond the first domestically-produced hardwood plywood brand to achieve this distinction, which assures Columbia customers that they are receiving panels that meet the challenging Phase 2 formaldehyde emission limit of .05 parts per million.

Though the Phase 2 limit on producing veneer core hardwood plywood destined for sale or use in California isn’t scheduled to take effect until January of 2010, PureBond veneer core panels are Columbia’s standard product, and available now.

A Difficult Hurdle

CARB reviewed 90 days’ worth of sample testing results (nearly 500 individual small chamber tests), their correlation to full panel tests, and the results of the full panel tests.

Exemption required that over 90% of the samples had to pass a .04 ppm limit, with none of the test data exceeding .05 ppm, making this the most challenging formaldehyde emission standard in the world today. As a comparison, the current “HUD” standard for formaldehyde emissions from composite wood products is .3 ppm – over seven times higher than the Phase 2 limit.

The exemption will last for two years, after which Columbia must apply for re-approval.

Validation

Brad Thompson, Columbia Forest Products’ President and CEO, said that this exemption “testifies to our decision to convert away from urea-formaldehyde adhesives throughout our seven plywood operations in favor of our PureBond formulation. Over 35 million panels later, we are proud to offer our customers a formaldehyde-free veneer core panel as our mill standard – with improved moisture resistance as an added benefit.”

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Thompson added that Columbia has gained in other ways from the conversion to PureBond. “Our internal reject rates have actually decreased, and we have gained entry to new segments of the market. Our employees no longer work in the proximity of formaldehyde fumes, and our customers are now able to avoid potential indoor air quality issues as well.

“We felt that everybody would benefit with PureBond, and now the California Air Resource Board has validated this perspective by granting our mills this exemption,” added Thompson.

How Low Can It Go?

The tests required to achieve the NAF category exemption bring to light the nature of formaldehyde emissions and their source. According to the EPA, “Formaldehyde is an important chemical used widely by industry to manufacture building materials and numerous household products. It is also a by-product of combustion and certain other natural processes. Thus, it may be present in substantial concentrations both indoors and outdoors.”

Panel testing for CARB is designed to draw out the formaldehyde gasses from inside specific panel samples, not the ambient air around them.

According to Steve Pung, Columbia’s Vice President of Technology, “the reason not all samples will test at 0.00 ppm is that the wood itself can naturally release very small amounts of formaldehyde. This is one reason why the CARB Phase 2 limit was set at .05 ppm – to allow for the ‘naturally occurring’ formaldehyde factor. However, our PureBond resin system is 100% formaldehyde-free, so in the end, our veneer core panels contribute no more VOC’s to the indoor air than natural wood itself.

“This is what CARB is essentially doing with the low Phase 2 limit. They are acknowledging that it’s next to impossible to remove all the formaldehyde from natural products like wood, and they assigned an emissions threshold that’s achievable on a mass-production basis,” said Pung.

About Columbia Forest Products

Founded in 1957, Columbia Forest Products is North America’s largest manufacturer of hardwood plywood and hardwood veneer, a leader in sustainable forestry, and innovator of formaldehyde-free PureBond® technology.

Columbia’s decorative interior veneers and panels are used in cabinetry, furniture, architectural millwork and commercial fixtures. Employee-owned and based in Greensboro, North Carolina, Columbia employs more than 2,100 and operates facilities throughout the United States and Canada, and an operational network which spans the globe. For more information, visit: www.cfpwood.com or cfpmarketing@cfpwood.com.

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