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## Industry kick-starts crucial research



*Bruce Breedt, Executive Director of SAWPA*

Our industry is kick-starting much-needed dependable research into timber treatment again, to fill the void that has been growing over the past two to three decades.

The aim of the research is to establish scientifically credible standards for the optimal treatment of the available fast-growing eucalyptus timber resource and, ultimately, to help ensure a strong and sustainable wood treatment industry.

Bruce Breedt, Executive Director of the South African Wood Preservers' Association (SAWPA), explains that the standards for treating eucalyptus have not kept pace with changes in the timber grown over the past 20 + years. "To get these standards back into line, we need scientific research conducted by an independent and reputable party," he says.

Masters students at the University of Stellenbosch will start the research at the beginning of the next academic year, and hopefully could finish within a year. This would be of benefit, and the industry urgently needs reliable data on optimal treatment to help address the problem of pole failures, says Bruce.

Supervised by their professors, the students will investigate the maximum average sapwood content of young eucalyptus poles; the minimum sapwood retentions of CCA and creosote required for long-term durability in timber that has contact with the ground; the maximum average tannin content of the eucalyptus trees, and the influence of this tannin content on the fixation of CCA in the poles.

In the past, research on timber treatment was conducted by the National Timber Research Institute, under the Forestry Department. This unit closed down in the early 1990s. The CSIR took up the baton but stopped the work after six or seven years, and no further research into timber treatment or other timber processing has taken place since then. Meanwhile, the nature of the eucalyptus undergoing treatment changed drastically as genetic engineering, hybridisation and cloning took place to improve the trees' protection against newly arising pests in plantations, and to speed up the growing process.

This faster growth results in younger wood, with a higher sapwood ratio. The exact implications for treatment and their extent, are not yet clear, which is why the research is so keenly needed.

"Research is intended to be one of SAWPA's major focus areas for the future, and further research will take place as and when the need arises," says Bruce.

**Source: Dolphin Bay Chemicals**