

SALT PULPING OF WOOD PILINGS

There have been several instances of a strange looking fuzzy decay and deterioration on wood pilings on Sanibel. There seemed to be no answer as to why this was happening and what to do to correct the problem.

Samples were taken from some pilings where this occurred and sent to Dr. Terry Amburgey at Mississippi State University. He is a recognized expert on wood products. He indicates this problem is called salt water pulping and caused by salt water being absorbed up into the piling. This happens because, in his opinion, the piling is not dried or aged properly prior to use.

To stop the action of the salt water, the water column in the piling must be blocked, some important facts and best possible suggestions to correct the problem are as follows:

1. The chromated copper arsenate (C.C.A.) pressure treatment is the most common method used. This is a waterborne treatment and drying prior to use of the wood piling is critical.

2. When driven into a salt water environment the natural air drying above grade causes the salty water to be sucked or drawn up into the wood.

3. It is necessary to block this water column action to stop this salt water pulping.

4. A suggested method to break this water column is to drill a 1/2 inch diameter hole in one face of the piling near the base at an angle downward into the center. Move to each of the other 3 faces of the piling moving up about 12" and drill similar holes. Pour these holes full of a water preservative generally available at a hardware store. Go back several times over a couple of weeks refilling the drilled holes. The preservative will be drawn into and absorbed by the piling. Then seal the hole.

5. Brush off existing fuzz and deteriorating wood from the face of the piling and coat with the water preservative.

6. This treatment as suggested should break the water column drawing the salt water into the column.

This is a treatment which is recommended by Dr. Amburgey and has not been tested, but in his opinion should correct the problem of salt water pulping. The Sanibel Building Department would like for people using this system to report back in approximately one year as a test program.

MAX W. ANDERSON
BUILDING OFFICIAL

January 12, 1996