

Woodworking Network

U.S. producers warn of unsafe Brazil plywood

By Karl D. Forth

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LYONS, OR - The U.S. Structural Plywood Integrity Coalition issued Product Advisory notices regarding Brazilian structural plywood. The distribution of the notices is the result of a motion for preliminary injunction filed on June 5 by the coalition of 10 U.S. plywood producers including Oregon's Freres Lumber Co.

The purpose of the advisory is to strongly recommend that all U.S. importers and resellers of Brazilian PS 1-09 plywood stop importing structural plywood from Brazil and quarantine whatever they have in inventory in the U.S. for the health and safety of consumers.

International Accreditation Service, Inc., which accredits TPI and PFS-TECO to inspect and test structural plywood, has now joined the coalition in advocating for "enhanced oversight procedures" for agencies that certify and inspect plywood that meets the PS 1-09 standard.

"Oregon used to be the highest volume plywood producer in the U.S.," said Tyler Freres, vice president of Freres Lumber Co. "As forest harvest levels were reduced in the Pacific Northwest, imports from environmentally sensitive areas of the world increased.

"Over the past 24 months, Freres Lumber Co. has endured significant losses, and our employees have suffered reduced hours worked and layoffs due to nearly two billion feet of counterfeit Brazilian plywood dumped into the United States. We look forward to the court stopping these bad actors."

The coalition's legal counsel sent Product Advisory notices to importers, Building Code Associations and home-builder associations throughout the U.S. warning against the purchase or sale of substandard and unsafe plywood imported from Brazil.

The coalition, which operates 12 U.S. plywood plants in six states with more than 4,500 workers, sued Timber Products Inspection (TPI) and PFS-Corporation (PFS-TECO) last September in federal court in Florida. TPI and PFS-TECO are the agencies that license structural grade stamps to plywood plants in Brazil. The stamps are required to enter the U.S. market. The substandard Brazilian plywood has been used in construction throughout the U.S.



PHOTO: FRERES PLYWOOD

"This case highlights how a few bad actors profited by essentially looking the other way while substandard, and potentially dangerous plywood was imported into the U.S. and used to build our homes and businesses," said Michael Haglund, legal counselor representing the U.S. manufacturers.

The substandard plywood is produced by 34 plants in southern Brazil. Companies like PFS-TECO and TPI inspect and certify that the plywood meets certain standards prior to import and sale in United States.

Building codes require that structural grade plywood panels incorporated into roofs, floors and walls of residential and commercial buildings in the U.S. are PS 1-09 certified for structural integrity. Although the Brazilian plywood was stamped PS 1-09 by PFS-TECO and TPI, it reportedly experienced massive failure rates during testing by the American Plywood Association and Clemson University.

The Coalition's June 5 motion asks a federal judge to order the revocation of all of the PS 1-09 certificates that have been issued to Brazilian mills. The certifying agencies must respond to the motion by June 19. A hearing is expected in early July.

According to Tyler Freres, the Coalition's goal is to successfully halt the importation of falsely certified Brazilian plywood and prevent any further sale of the unsafe plywood by quarantining current inventories. "In any other industry, when products are faulty or don't pass safety standards, they are recalled. We are merely asking for the Brazilian plywood to be recalled and for the agencies that falsely accredited their products to be held accountable."