

Logistics News: Wood Versus Plastic Pallet Battle Increasingly Focused on Green Supply Chain

iGPS Attorney Uses Public Meeting on Pest Control in Pallets to Blast Wood Pallet Green Credentials

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The battle between the wood and plastic pallet industry continues to move in interesting directions, with the "Green Supply Chain" now being front and center.

Not long ago, the issue of wood versus plastic pallets was primarily about total supply chain costs. Now, sensing a potential opening, the plastic pallet side, led by Intelligent Global Pooling Systems (iGPS), is pushing the Green argument for plastic hard – though the evidence about which pallet construction is really more Green is unclear. (See [Green Supply Chain Debate Increasingly Focuses on the Lowly Pallet](#).)

Earlier this year, the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) unexpectedly considered changed standards for sprinkler requirements for distribution centers using wood-based pallets – a move that likely would have caused chaos for many companies, and potentially huge expense to upgrade sprinkler systems. While the move was postponed and likely will not go in that direction, some suspected that the catalyst for the idea was a lobbyist connected to the bromide industry – a chemical used as a flame retardant in plastic pallets. A switch from wood to plastic pallets would have been good for bromide makers. (See [Shippers Dodge a Bullet, for Now, as Fire Marshals Group Tables Wood Pallet Classification Changes](#).)

Now, the U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is reviewing potential changes in revamping and consolidating requirements for treatment of wood pallets to prevent the spread of environmental pests, such as the emerald ash borer and

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Asian longhorned beetle. APHIS is considering extending requirements for treatment of wood pallets coming into the US to prevent importation of such pests, using processes such as heat treatment or fumigation with methyl bromide.

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"We at iGPS believe that substituting plastic pallets for wood pallets wherever feasible would maximize protection to U.S. forests against the spread of invasive pests and deforestation, as well as maximize protection to the environment and the U.S. food supply," Anderson said in prepared comments to the APHIS commentary meeting in Portland, OR on September, 2.

"Wood pallets are an environmentally destructive, outmoded shipping and storage system whose value has been outstripped by advances in plastic pallet technology," he added. "Plastic pallets are the most environmentally sustainable pallets in use today. They beat wood pallets on all environmental

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criteria including ozone depletion and global warming.”

Anderson then cited a number of points in favor of plastic pallets. According to Anderson:

- Wood pallets are a major factor in deforestation. Nearly 40% of all hard wood harvested in the U.S. is for pallets. Of these, about two-thirds are limited use, one-way pallets.
- In 2006, wood pallets used 7.6 billion board feet of lumber, enough trees to cover an area 10 times the size of Manhattan, in just that year alone.
- Over the past 150 years, deforestation has contributed an estimated 30% of the atmospheric build-up of CO₂, a major greenhouse gas.
- Plastic pallets are a long life asset – approximately 15 years. On the other hand, wood pallets have a 3 year life, and that’s assuming they are regularly repaired and renewed – which requires the use of additional wood or the cannibalization of other pallets.
- Plastic pallets are 100 percent recyclable – they are ground and reused at the end of their life, whereas wood pallets present a major waste problem.
- Indeed, wood pallets amount to about 20 percent of all land filled wood waste. The decay this



waste produces includes, among other things, methane which is a significantly more damaging greenhouse gas than even CO₂.

- Should an iGPS pallet become damaged, it will simply be remolded into a new one, thus eliminating the wood pallet "disposal issue."
- Wood pallets are heavier than plastic pallets, and use substantially more fuel to transport, which increases greenhouse-gas emissions.

He also cited reduced risk for environmental pest movement in logistics through use of plastic pallets.

Obviously, wood pallet providers, of which there are hundreds, take a very different view.

More on all this soon from SCDigest.