

# EYE ON THE ENVIRONMENT | How much wood would you chuck at \$500 per ton?

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Picture: Decking lumber will be considered hazardous waste starting in January 2021.

by David Goldstein

In just one week, disposal of treated wood will become much more difficult. If you want to purge your landscaping of railroad ties or telephone poles, or if you need to discard demolition debris including fence posts, sill plates, landscape timbers, pilings, guardrails or decking, you will no longer be able to put these items in your garbage can, rent a bin to discard them or take them to a local landfill. Starting in January, discarded treated wood will be regarded as hazardous waste.

According to Rizgar Ghazi, acting deputy director of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control's Hazardous Management Program, new regulations are coming which will once again legalize disposal of treated wood in regular landfills with new restrictions. But until that change is made, disposal will be difficult.

As the department's website states, treated wood "contains hazardous chemicals that pose a risk to human health and the environment." These chemicals protect the wood from insect attack and fungal decay, but "harmful exposure to these chemicals may result from touching, inhaling or ingesting." Inhaling and ingesting particles of treated wood most commonly occur through exposure to sawdust or smoke.

Last year, the department issued a report, detailing findings regarding compliance with “alternative management standards” enacted to allow the safe handling, storage, transport and disposal of treated wood without requiring treated wood waste to be handled as hazardous waste. As stated in the report, titled “Treated Wood Waste: Implementation of Senate Bill 162,” the department found “a high noncompliance rate” with the alternative standards, endangering human health and the environment. The most frequent violations were lack of personnel training . . . inadequate accumulation area labeling; failure to submit generator notifications; providing incomplete or incorrect information in semiannual reports;” and improper storage. The department’s “compliance summary” at the end of the report stated, “Approximately 60 percent of the inspections conducted resulted in citations of one or more violations.”

Following the report, regulators and legislators tried to come up with new ways to keep people safe from the dangers of treated wood waste, but nothing has yet been enacted, so the regulations allowing treated wood waste to be handled with alternative management standards expire on December 31, 2020, and starting the next day, as the red font on the department’s website makes clear, “All hazardous treated wood waste managed in California will have to be stored and manifested as hazardous waste and transported to class I hazardous waste landfills.”

Last month, the California Product Stewardship Council, a non-profit group advocating for manufacturers and retailers to take responsibility for the costs of their products’ lifecycle impact, emailed a warning to their listserv. Doug Kobold, the council’s executive director, warned, “At this point, I am hearing costs of \$500/ton for transportation and disposal [of treated wood] in a Class I landfill, so a remedy needs to be found quickly.”

For just the next week, the Simi Valley Landfill and Recycling Center will accept treated wood from Ventura County customers for \$80 per ton, requiring advanced reservations for burial in a specially prepared area of the landfill. Toland Road, the only other landfill in Ventura County, does not accept treated wood.

Starting in January, until emergency regulations, an urgency legislative bill or some other solution emerges, local household hazardous waste collection events may be the only convenient way to discard treated wood. But these appointment-based events allow residents to bring only up to 125 pounds per load. Jennifer Wagner, an account manager for Clean Earth, which contracts with many cities and counties to handle materials from their household hazardous waste collection events, noted in an email that treated lumber will likely have to be hauled all the way to Beatty or Fernley, both in Nevada.

Stockpiling of treated lumber will likely become more common as options for disposal become less convenient and more expensive, and storage of up to 90 days is legal, according to Ghazi. The deputy director said, “I expect there will be some solution for most people before those 90 days are over.”

*On the web:*

[dtsc.ca.gov/toxics-in-products/treated-wood-waste/](http://dtsc.ca.gov/toxics-in-products/treated-wood-waste/)

[dtsc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2019/04/2019-treated-wood-waste-report.pdf](http://dtsc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2019/04/2019-treated-wood-waste-report.pdf)

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