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Potentially Toxic Woods

The following information is reprinted with permission from data provided by Roy Banner, a wood turner from Torrance, California who almost lost his life in 1989 to anaphylactic shock after turning pieces of exotic wood. You can bet Roy wears his RACAL respirator every time he turns on his lathe now! Roy has assembled this data over the years from various sources and when an entry appears in red, this indicates that the information has come from only one source and has not been verified elsewhere. Some of the information here has come as a surprise to me and its a wonder I've never had a toxic reaction to wood that I've been aware of. As a luthier, I've worked with a lot of exotics, but as a wood collector I've worked with lots more strange stuff from all over the world with no ill effects. Each of us is different and you can call me old "iron gut".

Sorry that this file is such a patchwork effort and may be difficult to follow, and that Latin names of woods are not included. I can't judge with any authority the validity of the information presented here and it's up to the user's discretion to further research any wood themselves, though Roy has told me the information here has appeared in several woodworking magazines (for what that's worth). Take this as a jumping off point. You might also want to check out **The Botanical Dermatology Database**.

After each wood name comes categories between slashes / /:

- **Class:** Woods are either an irritant which cause a reaction fairly rapidly after exposure and will cause a similar reaction repeatedly, or sensitizers which may have a latency period of hours or months and may require repeated handling before reaction occurs. Sensitizer's are the more severe, because once you're sensitized, you're sensitized for life and the reactions only get more dramatic. A bit like paying taxes to the Gov, huh?
- **Reaction Category:**
    - Eye and skin irritation (hives, itching, redness).
    - Respiratory problems.
    - Nausea, headache, or general malaise, possibly even liver or kidney malfunction.
    - Cancer of nose and sinus. Statistics show that woodworkers have a 40 per cent greater chance of nasal cancer than the general population, but the majority of statistics on nasal cancer are based on data from 1920-1960 when the furniture industry became highly mechanized with little or no dust control methods. So don't freak.
- **Potency:** Small, great, extreme. This is the potential of the wood or sawdust doing harm and

would vary with the individual i.e., those who are allergy prone might think twice about working with wood classed as extremely potent.

- **Source:** Dust or wood, or both
- **Incidence:** Unknown, rare, or common. This is probably the vaguest of the categories as most doctors wouldn't know an allergic reaction to wood if it bit them in the face.

Note that this data does not take into consideration Man's penchant for trying to poison himself by using formaldehyde in plywood, treated woods, sodium compounds in white pine to prevent blue stain, etc.

- Afromosia: irritant/eye & skin, respiratory/great/dust/rare
- Alder: irritant/eye & skin, respiratory
- Angelico: irritant/eye & skin, respiratory/great/dust
- Arborvitae: irritant/respiratory
- Ash: irritant/respiratory
- Baldcypress: sensitizer/respiratory/small/dust/rare
- Balsam fir: sensitizer/eye & skin/small/dust/rare
- Beech: sensitizer/respiratory/great/dust/rare
- Birch: sensitizer/respiratory, nausea/great/dust, wood/rare
- Black locust: irritant/nausea/great/rare
- Blackwood: sensitizer/eye & skin/great/dust, wood/common
- Boxwood: sensitizer/respiratory/small/dust, wood/rare
- Cashew: sensitizer/eye & skin/great/dust, wood/rare
- Chechem: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin/great/dust, wood/unknown
- Cocobolo: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin/great/dust, wood/common
- Dahoma: sensitizer/respiratory/great/dust/common
- Ebony: irritant, sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin/great/dust, wood/common
- Elm: sensitizer/eye & skin/small/dust/rare
- Fir: irritant/eye & skin/small/rare

- Goncolo alves: sensitizer/eye & skin/small/dust, wood/rare
- Greenheart: sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin/extreme/dust, wood/common
- Guarea: sensitizer/eye & skin/extreme/dust/rare
- Hemlock: nasal cancer/great/dust/rare
- Ipe: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin
- Iroko: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin/extreme/dust, wood/common
- Katon: irritant/respiratory
- Kingwood: irritant/eye & skin
- Mahogany, American: sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin/small/dust/rare
- Mahogany, African: sensitizer/respiratory/great/dust/rare
- Makore: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin
- Mansonia: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin/extreme/dust, wood/common
- Manzinilla: irritant/respiratory/dust/rare
- Maple: sensitizer/respiratory/great/dust, wood/rare
- Mimosa: irritant/nasal/extreme/dust, wood/common
- Myrtle: sensitizer/respiratory/great/dust, wood/common
- Oak, red: nasal/great/dust/rare
- Obeche: sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin/great/dust/common
- Olivewood: sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin/great/dust, wood/common
- Opepe: sensitizer/respiratory/small/dust/rare
- Orangewood: respiratory/rare
- Padauk: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin, nausea/extreme/dust, wood/common
- Pau ferro: sensitizer/eye & skin/small/dust, wood/rare
- Peroba rose: sensitizer/respiratory/great/dust, wood/common
- Peroba white: sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin
- Purpleheart: sensitizer/eye & skin, nausea/small/dust, wood/rare

- Quebracho: nasal cancer/great/dust/rare
- Ramin: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin/small/dust/rare
- Redwood: sensitizer/respiratory, nasal cancer/small/dust/rare
- Rosewood(s): irritant, sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin/extreme/dust, wood/common
- Satinwood: irritant/respiratory, eye & skin/extreme/dust, wood/common
- Sassafras: sensitizer/respiratory, nausea, nasal cancer/small/dust, wood/rare
- Sequoia: irritant/respiratory, nasal cancer/small/dust, wood/rare
- Snakewood: irritant/respiratory/great/dust, wood/rare
- Spruce: sensitizer/respiratory/small/dust, wood/rare
- Stavewood: irritant/respiratory
- Sucupira: irritant/respiratory
- Teak: sensitizer/eye & skin/extreme/dust/common
- Walnut, black: sensitizer/eye & skin/great/leaves & bark/unknown
- Wenge: sensitizer/respiratory, eye & skin/great/dust/common
- Willow: sensitizer/nasal cancer/great/dust/unknown
- W. redcedar: sensitizer/respiratory, nasal cancer/great/dust/common
- Yew, Europe: irritant/eye & skin/great/dust/common
- Zebrawood: sensitizer/eye & skin/great/dust/rare

http://www.mimf.com/archives/toxic.htm