OCAD Wood Shop

Use of Potentially Toxic Woods

Many exotic and some domestic woods are known as 'irritants' and cause allergic, toxic, infectious or respiratory reactions. Other woods and their dust are also known as 'sensitizers'. These materials may have a latency period of hours or months and may require repeated handling before reaction occurs. Sensitizers are considered more severe, because once you are sensitized, you are sensitized for life, and the reactions only get more dramatic. Although researchers point out that not everyone is sensitive to these woods, they warn that woodworkers in general, should be extremely cautious when sanding or milling them. This is particularly relevant in a shop atmosphere like ours, where we have many students working in the same shop and breathing the same air. You may be very cautious and protect yourself appropriately (ie gloves, respirator, etc.), but the person beside you, or across the room, may not be. Furthermore, students or staff with respiratory ailments, such as bronchial disorders and asthma or skin and eye allergies may be more susceptible to the woods natural oils or resins.

In an effort to provide our staff and students with a safe environment to work and learn, the use of any wood not regularly stocked by the College, will be closely monitored. Before any woods deemed potential risks are brought into the woodshop, the project must be proposed to a wood shop instructor, who in turn will approve/deny the project. Furthermore, quantities of potentially toxic woods used in the shop will be limited to "one (1) board foot". The continued use of these woods will be conditional on the fact that no one in the shop/College is adversely affected by the sanding or milling of said wood. If an adverse reaction is reported by a student or staff member, Ted Rickard (Health and Safety Manager) and Mark Jeffrey (Studio Manager), in consultation with the woodshop faculty will set forth appropriate guidelines for the use/non-use of the wood product in question.

There have been at least 45 types of wood identified as being 'toxic'. They range from the common Maple to the Rosewood family. Please refer to resource materials listed below for further information. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact Mark Jeffrey (x362)or Ted Rickard (x615).

Resource Materials on Toxic Woods

Information regarding toxic woods are kept in a binder labeled "Toxic Woods and Toxic Wood Treatment" and can be found in the OCAD Wood Shop collection of reference materials.

As well, the Internet provides many sources of information. Links to some of these can be found on the OCAD Wood Shop Web page: http://www.student.ocad.on.ca/staff/woodshop/links/toxic.htm"

Some of these links include:

- Toxicity of Wood: http://www.city-net.com/albertfp/toxic.htm
- Wood Dust: Material Safety Data Sheet: http://www.columbuslumber.com/woodDust.html
- Toxic Woods: http://artsnet.heinz.cmu.edu:70/0/csa/arthazards/visualarts/woodchrt
- Potentially Toxic Woods: http://www.mimf.com/archives/toxic.htm
- Frequently-asked Questions About Treated Wood: http://www.awpi.org/oaq-a.html
- Wood Treatment: The Canadian perspective: http://www.ns.ec.gc.ca/epb/factsheets/wood.html