

The Certified Scoop: Treated Lumber

Treated lumber is a common concern for producers transitioning to organic certification. In this week's Certified.Scoop, we're breaking down everything you need to know about treated wood on your operation.

The Regulation:

The National Organic Program (NOP) rule on treated lumber is found in [7 CFR 205.206\(f\)](#):

"The producer must not use lumber treated with arsenate or other prohibited materials for new installations or replacement purposes in contact with soil or livestock."

This short rule carries a lot of important details, so let's break it down step-by-step.

1) "...New installations or replacement purposes"

If your operation already has treated wood, don't worry - it won't automatically disqualify you from certification! However, once certified, you **cannot** install new treated lumber that comes into contact with soil or livestock. For replacements, consider alternatives like metal posts or untreated wood for fences and trellises.

2) "...Arsenate or other prohibited materials"

The rule specifically bans arsenate-treated lumber, which usually means **chromated copper arsenate (CCA)**. CCA was widely used from the 1940s until it was banned in 2003 due to contamination risks. Many older structures and fences still contain CCA-treated wood.

To identify treated wood, look for:

- A green tint
- Treatment incisions (small cuts ½ to ¾ inches long)
- Chemical-like smells



While certifiers may allow **existing** arsenate-treated wood, they are much stricter about **creosote-treated lumber**, such as old railroad ties or telephone poles. Creosote is significantly more toxic and more likely to leach into the environment. If creosote-treated wood is present on land you want certified, the creosote **must** be removed before certification.

3) "...In contact with soil or livestock."

Certified operations must prevent **direct contact** between treated wood and soil or livestock. Most organic certifiers also require that **crops** are prevented from contact with treated wood.

If pre-existing treated wood is present, you can reduce risks by:

- Implementing **buffer zones** between treated lumber and crop-growing areas
- Installing **hot wires** to keep livestock away
- Wrapping posts in **metal or plywood sheaths** to prevent crop/livestock contact

If treated wood must be used, you'll need a **contamination prevention plan** as part of your Organic System Plan.

Summary

Although the regulation on treated lumber is only one sentence, it's a complex issue in organic farming. If you have further questions, you can always check in with your certifier to ensure compliance with organic standards!