

Crossties

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The Magazine For Producers And Users Of Treated Wood Crossties And Related Products.

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Across All Borders

RTA Tie Graders From The United States, Mexico And Canada Convene In Wisconsin

Each year the Railway Tie Association (RTA) gathers interested members together for an intense work session on tie grading. The Annual RTA Crosstie Grading Seminar, now in its 16th year, is designed to hone the tie grading skills of both the experienced and the uninitiated. Students are asked to learn about species identification, tie defects, treating, quality control and much more. The following pictorial essay tells the story of the 2002 version of the seminar.



Day 1 finds seminar attendees reacquainting themselves with the structure of wood and the wide variety of species that can be used for crossties.



Studying includes recognizing important features from different views of wood samples. Most of the keys to identification are easily discerned from cross-section views, but students also learn the identification tricks of the trade when examining radial and tangential cuts.



Lectures and classroom work turn quickly into field application. Students are exposed to the AREMA/RTA tie specifications and are asked to learn to recognize defects that would shorten a tie's life expectancy. Here, instructor Jimmy Watt of The Crosstie Connection focuses students' attention on full-sized ties, helping them identify the important features and defects.



Students are then given the chance to test themselves.



With ID key in hand...



For example, it is important to know if this is a split or a check, and whether it is acceptable.



After this, students hear from the instructors about the first set of ties.



Everybody wants to know how they performed in the first field application.



Day 2 The next morning finds students back in the classroom for additional study and review.

After a couple of lectures on quality control and how treating plants work, the students tour a working operation.

This year's host, Webster Industries, has a completely rebuilt treating operation.



In real life, tie graders have about six to eight seconds to make all the calls about species and grades.



Good-looking ties are easy to spot.



But when you are looking at several hundred ties during a shift, it pays to be as prepared as possible. Preparing students for inspecting ties is what the tie grading seminar is all about.



Students also learn about proper air-drying techniques...



...and how ties are treated.



Then, the instruction becomes more hands-on for our students. And this time it counts. The winner of this tie grading field test is awarded a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond.



During the practical examination, Matt Clarke of Gross and Janes, left, this year's RTA president, visits with seminar instructor Dr. Mike Barnes of Mississippi State University (MSU). Matt studied forestry at MSU under Dr. Barnes' instruction.



This year's star in both wood identification and overall grading scores was Johnny White of Koppers Industries Inc. out of Willow Springs, Mo. Johnny won two \$100 U.S. Savings Bonds. Marshall Allen of Metrolink, chairman of RTA's Education Committee, extends his congratulations to Johnny.

The day's work is not complete, though, until the entire class poses for a final picture. This year's class of 36 students is a recent record for attendance. All of the students, staff and instructors wish to especially thank Webster Industries' Steve Hanson and Jeremy Meyer and all the Webster folks for making this a great learning experience. Thanks Webster Industries!



Tie Grading Seminar 2002 Attendees, Instructors & Staff

Mike Aarstad of Burlington Northern Santa Fe; Alejandro Autrique of COMAPO; Mike Axelsen, Jon Bradley, Rick Ebert, Steve Hanson, Scott Herman, Bill Johnson, Joey Lamb, Dave Larson, Stan Manke, Kendall Maxwell, Russ Neidfeldt, Ralph Rostkowski, Kevin Schlosser and Mike Thompson of Webster Industries; Danny Bedwell and Steve Ladner of Kerr-McGee Chemical LLC; Terry Clements of Superior Tie & Timber; Joseph Clay Crum of Rock Island Tie & Timber; Gary Devlin and Don Perrault of AG Processing Inc.; Jim Evans, Doug Lowe, Michael Mancione, John Miller, Colonel Mister, William Newton and Johnny White of Koppers Industries; Eric Evergerd of MiTek Industries Inc.; Larry Fines of Ashcroft Treating; Richard Kotan of Omaha Public Power District; Dean Peters and LeRoy Shawanokasic of Menominee Tribal Enterprises; and Brad Schaack and John Verdi of Red River Valley & Western Railroad.

Instructors were Terry Amburgey and Mike Barnes of Mississippi State University; Jeff Morrell of Oregon State University; and Jim Watt of The Crosstie Connection. On hand representing RTA were Jim Gauntt, executive director, and Marshall Allen of Metrolink, chairman of the RTA Education Committee. Johnny White of Koppers Industries won both tie grading field competitions at the seminar.



Bonus Session For Graders A Success

This year's attendees to the tie grading seminar were treated to a bonus session on the engineering principles behind the use of wood ties. This half-day session, conducted by RTA's executive director, Jim Gauntt, featured video instruction and a 60-plus-page manual put together in conjunction with ZETA-TECH Associates' Don Holfeld. This mini-version of RTA's full-day seminar has been under development for several years. The initial test of this session was well received and gave everyone the basics of why tie specifications exist the way they do today. Parties interested in either RTA's full-day session or the soon-to-be released video version should contact RTA offices at (770) 460-5553 for more information.

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