

Why Hardwood Lumber Grading Rules Are Important To The Tie Industry

Dana Spessert, NHLA Chief Inspector

The National Hardwood Lumber Association (NHLA) was formed in 1898 to create a standard to trade hardwood lumber. These rules have been republished and modified many times throughout the years to refine their meaning and purpose.

In the beginning, NHLA controlled how lumber was inspected through NHLA national inspectors. These inspectors graded nearly all the hardwood lumber at kiln facilities located in industrial regions throughout the United States and Canada. The sawmills would ship ungraded lumber to these large concentration yards to be kiln-dried and then graded. As you could imagine, a lot of trust went into this arrangement, but at the time it was the best method.

Over the years, as rural areas grew and became more industrialized, the central kiln-drying operations became less and less important to the sawmill side of the industry, which created a new challenge of how to value the lumber being cut at the mills.

In 1946, after WWII, the Veterans Administration began seeking ways for returning soldiers to get back into the workforce. The VA worked with several groups at the time to reintegrate the returning veterans. The education provided by NHLA for a career in the hardwood industry was a great opportunity.

In 1948, the first official school of the association was formed, and the first class was held in Memphis, Tenn. Its purpose was to educate individuals to become hardwood lumber inspectors. The new school educated 96 students during the first year. These new graduates helped solve one of the biggest challenges in the hardwood industry's changing landscape; now sawmills could value their own products.

Since that first class in 1948, the NHLA Inspector Training School has graduated more than 7,500 students and not only helped the industry but also helped individuals create better lives as skilled tradesmen. The industry now had the opportunity to



hire its own hardwood inspectors and further add value to its products.

One of the core concepts of the NHLA Grading Rules is to separate grades to be sold into different manufacturing sectors. FAS, F1F and Selects are typically utilized in the manufacturing of mouldings and millwork, where large clear pieces of wood are needed for those types of processes. The 1 Common is primarily utilized in the cabinet and furniture industries. The 2 & 3a Common is typically used in the flooring or in the production of smaller furniture and cabinet parts.

Over the years, railway tie sawmills have created some of the highest-grade lumber by percentage of lumber sawn due to its use of a much larger center cut (cant) where the lower grades are typically found. I believe that all tie sawmills could benefit from having their hardwood lumber grade inspected. Creating truckload quantities to benefit from a secondary product can be very profitable in some cases.

The NHLA Inspector Training School holds three eight-week classes per year, with optional online training and short courses to accommodate everyone interested in learning a new career. Please visit our website at www.nhla.com and to learn more about our upcoming classes and how this knowledge could benefit you and your company. ■



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HARDWOOD PROCUREMENT TRENDS EASTERN HALF U.S. NOVEMBER 2022

The gauges below represent "snapshot in time" opinions of in-the-field wood tie buyers who procure untreated crossties from sawmills in their regions. RTA does not warrant nor accept responsibility for the accuracy of the data generated. See more on rtastats.org.

