Final preparations are being made for the Railway Tie Association’s (RTA) Annual Tie Grading Seminar, slated for Aug. 2-4 in the Roanoke/Salem, Va., area.

Fieldwork, including the Species Identification and Crosstie Grading Derby, will take place at the Koppers Inc. plant in Salem.

Students will receive instruction and perform field exercises covering untreated wood deterioration, storage and handling, species identification, defects and grading, treating technology, and more.

This year, the seminar has been expanded to include three full days of instruction to accommodate a variety of learning experiences, including grading station videos, discussion and testing, as well as an additional review session on species identification. The course has also been revamped to give more one-on-one time with instructors at the full-sized tie grading session on day two of the seminar.

“Our instructors have worked very hard the past few years to evolve the seminar in meaningful ways,” Gauntt said. “We have updated it again this year with several new presentations designed to enhance the learning experience and make this the best offering of its type anywhere.”

A roster of “distinguished experts in the forest products industry will provide seminar instruction,” Gauntt said, who is also serving as an instructor. Other instructors include Marshall L. Allen, district manager, Track and Right of Way Maintenance for Metrolink Commuter Rail System in Southern California; Terry Conners, associate extension professor at the University of Kentucky; Jeff Morrell, a researcher at Oregon State University in the Department of Forest Products; and Jimmy Watt, owner of The Crosstie Connection in Austinville, Va.

The cost of the seminar is $525, which includes the price of the seminar, take-home materials, Sunday night reception and dinner Monday night (sponsored by Koppers).

Attendees should arrange for their own accommodations by the July 1 deadline through the Holiday Inn Tanglewood in Roanoke by calling (540) 774-4400. Attendees must ask for the RTA room block during the registration process to receive the negotiated $113/night + tax and $137/night + tax for a double room. Room block will be lifted July 1st.

The course will begin at 8:45 a.m. on Sunday, August 2.