



**27 March 2012**

Dear Fabricator Members of the ITC-SA

**National Communiqué No 004**

As off recently, it has become more popular to look further afield for the supply of structural timber in South Africa. This is due to the availability of the product locally and the varying exchange rates.

For those that have considered, or are considering this route, you need to take note of the following points:

- Timber may only be imported according to the protocol set out in SANS 1783-1:2009 Annex D
- This protocol includes only solid structural timber with dimensions greater than 38x90mm
- No finger jointed material is accepted.
- The timber needs to be identified according to:
  - The country of origin
  - Geographical area
  - Cross section and intended grades (South African sizes and grades)
- The timber needs to be mechanically grade tested
- This testing has be undertaken under the auspices of an SANS 1783 accredited certification body.

To summarize the present situation:

- Zimbabwean timber (Species Pinus) has in the past been tested for compliance, and was found to be acceptable as structural timber in the South African Market.
- Although the standards have been reported to have slipped badly in Zimbabwe over the past 6 years, there appears to be a revival, and better quality product is presumably being produced.
- The dimensional tolerances of Zimbabwean timber still appear to be a problem, something which is critical in the manufacture of prefabricated roof trusses.
- The local industry (SABS, NHBRC and ITC-SA) expects from the South African manufacturers of structural timber to be certified by an accredited Product Certification Body. At the moment only SATAS and SABS are accredited to certify manufacturers of structural timber to the requirements of SANS 1783. There is no SANS 1783 accredited certification body in any other country in Southern Africa.

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- Finger jointed material supplied from Zimbabwe, in contravention of the requirements of SANS 1783-1, was found to be problematic due to the lack of quality control and structural members could not be relied upon to have the required strength. Several problems have been encountered with the finger joints failing. This failure can be attributed to the types of adhesives used and the quality control in the application of the adhesives to the profiles. At the moment finger jointed timber is excluded implying that only solid timber may be imported for structural purposes.
- Timber derived from pinus species grown in Southern Africa was tested for compliance with our national standards. Based on the results of these tests **solid** structural timber from Zimbabwe was accepted for the South African structural market.

Timber imported from other countries:

- There have been instances of timber sourced and imported from other countries.
- It must be noted that there are only three certified mark holders, 2 in New Zealand and one in Argentina at present, and as such, all other timber imported into South Africa would have to undergo mechanical grading in South Africa.
- It is possible for an overseas supplier to gain approval as a mark holder, but this needs to be done in accordance with the SANS procedures.

### ***The South African Timber user/Fabricator and the Consumer Protection Act (CPA):***

With the advent of the Consumer Protection Act, the onus resides with the user of the product to satisfy himself that the product (timber) has been correctly graded to the SANS Specification.

The user may have an immediate comeback from the supplier on acceptance of the material, but if the material is used, and then found to be deficient, the user may be liable.

If there is a latent defect, there may be recourse back to the original supplier, but only as a second respondent in a legal action. This has not been tested in court yet.

If you, as the importer of structural timber, do not satisfy yourself as to the validity of the grading and dimensions in accordance with the South African Standards, in terms of the CPA, you will be liable should there be any problems. The responsibility can no longer be passed back to the original supplier, which in this case will be overseas.

The Consumer Protection Act is exactly what it says, it is there to protect the consumer. The supplier and user now need to ensure that the individual items that go to make up the finished product are each in accordance with the South African Specifications and rules for that product.

Areas where special attention is required in the timber industry are:

- The grading, dimensions and specifications of imported timber
- The use of finger jointed imported material

### **Conclusion:**

This information is made available to ITC-SA Fabricator Members to ensure that an informed decision is possible, and that no ITC-SA Member is exposed to litigation due to ignorance.

Yours faithfully

**Fred Wagenaar**

(on behalf of the ITC-SA Technical Advisory Committee)