

Post disposal creates producer headache

By **TIM MARSHALL**
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In Australia, vineyards use approximately 50 per cent of all agricultural posts, with the majority of pine posts used in agriculture treated with copper-chromium-arsenic timber preservative.

For many years CCA was treated as relatively benign and its use was widespread. Most people knew that it should not be burnt, and if it was burnt the ash should not be applied to gardens or farmland. In the new era of environmental and chemical awareness, with much better detection systems and the inevitable effect of time and gradual decay or careless disposal, CCA materials are attracting much more attention.

All three of the constituents of CCA are toxic. Arsenic raises

AT A GLANCE

- Burial, landfill only options
- 6m posts break each year
- Plastic coating cuts breakage

toxicity and social responsibility concerns at the source mines in China. Concerns continue about its use in public parks and backyards, where it appears in fences, decks and outdoor furniture, and in trellis and fences on farms. Perhaps the most current and pressing issue is the final disposal of CCA in landfill. Chromium is not much less of a concern for human health, animals or plants, although copper is generally only a serious problem for aquatic life.

Health and environmental concerns have influenced the banning of CCA from organic farms

and playgrounds, and regulators are placing more restrictions on storage and disposal of CCA timber.

Incineration of CCA treated timber is prohibited in Australia due to the high concentration of toxic metals in the ash. Therefore the main method for disposal is on site burying or removal to a landfill site, with some potential for environmental harm from leaching of chemical from the timber into soil, streams or groundwater. As a result, many landfill operators no longer accept industrial quantities of treated timber posts.

As vineyards posts age they become brittle and more susceptible to breakage from machinery impact. Annual replacement rate of posts in a vineyard may be as high as 5pc in new vineyards, rising to more than 10pc as posts age. Within five years, six million posts will require disposal annually, equivalent to more than 120,000 cubic metres – approximately twice the annual amount of waste deposited in landfill catering for a population of 60,000 people.

If vineyards are to be replanted after 25 to 30 years, a significant volume of CCA-treated posts will require disposal should they be found unsuitable for reuse. Assuming that a vineyard has a span of 25 years, there will be a peak around 2024, at which time somewhere between eight and 16 million obsolete posts will require disposal within the year, in addition to the six million posts requiring disposal as a result of annual breakages.

Grapegrowers are increasingly looking for alternative post products to overcome the



WoodShield posts are strong, light and suitable for any agricultural use.

complications surrounding CCA post use, although metal and plastic posts are yet to be used widely.

WoodShield is an Australian company manufacturing a non-treated timber post encased in recycled plastic. WoodShield posts are strong, light, durable, sustainable relative to alternative materials, versatile and suitable for any agricultural use. The combination of the two materials – untreated pine posts and recycled plastic – produces unique benefits.

The timber provides the essential rigidity, while the plastic provides additional support and strength. Both greatly increase resistance to breaks from shaking, bending or twisting and eliminate splinters, rot and borers. The result is that a smaller post can be used, reducing weight and making handling easier. The process does not use persistent chemicals and the post is completely recyclable.

Because of the protective properties, toughness and life span of polyethylene coating, a WoodShield post has 40pc to 50pc more strength than other timber posts of the same size and a 100pc greater breaking angle. The manufacturing process creates a strong adhesive bond between the timber and the plastic sheath, completely sealing the post and leaving no timber exposed,

preventing borers and other pests. The plastic also adds exceptional resistance to bending, warping and splitting. The post ends are capped with an extra thick plastic layer so they can be hydraulically knocked into the ground exactly as a standard timber post would be.

Because of WoodShield's strength and flexibility there are minimal breakages from mechanical harvesting and pruning.

The polyethylene is completely inert so plastic coated timber posts provide superior performance in extreme climates. They will not sag from heat or become brittle in the cold.

The product is easy to handle and does not have the rough surfaces of CCA or the unpleasant characteristics of creosote.

Any standard fasteners suitable for use in timber can be used and even electrification is easier and cheaper because the plastic requires fewer insulators and less maintenance.

WoodShield is approved for use on certified organic properties, and has a certificate from Biological Farmers of Australia and BioGro in New Zealand. WoodShield posts have been in the ground in vineyards for more than seven years and the feedback received from both growers and contractors has been positive.

Details: woodshield.com.au



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Orange prepares for shiraz symposium

THE eyes of Australian cool climate shiraz winegrowers will be on Orange in October as the region hosts the 2012 National Cool Climate Shiraz Symposium.

The two-day event will be held on October 24 and 25 at the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries training facility.

"The objective of the two days is to facilitate the improvement of the viticulture and winemaking of cool climate shiraz," Symposium organiser Peter Hedberg said.

"Shiraz is Australia's number one red variety and given that its home is Hermitage, which is itself a cool climate region, suggests that it may be best grown in Australia's cooler climates to achieve a more elegant aromatic wine style."

"Whilst there is a focus on growing cool climate shiraz and the associated winemaking, we are not forgetting the marketing and sales aspect. This helps keep it in perspective, as we are not only trying to increase quality, but we are aware that the industry needs to be marketing focused."

The speakers will cover a range of topics including a 'Shiraz market overview', 'Adapting winemaking techniques to cool climate grown Shiraz', and 'Unique features of shiraz and its viticulture'.

Details: tasteorange.com.au

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