GCTF Proposal
Restrict Cancer-Causing Formaldehyde in Building Materials

Implemented
Formaldehyde Standards for Composite Wood Products Act

Summary

Formaldehyde is a carcinogen and irritant found in composite wood materials, which are widely used in construction.

This federal law establishes limits on the content of formaldehyde in non-structural composite wood products.

New Requirements or Changes

Effective: 180 days after EPA enacts implementation rules, which must occur no later than January 1, 2013. These changes do not apply retroactively; they only apply to products manufactured after the effective date.

Formaldehyde Standards for Composite Wood Products Act

- Limits emissions of formaldehyde from hardwood plywood, particleboard, and medium-density fiberboard sold, supplied, offered for sale or manufactured in the U.S.
- Standards apply to both unfinished panels and when composite wood is incorporated into finished products
- Emissions standards follow those established by California Air Resources Board and recommended by the NYC Green Codes Task Force
- Exemptions include:
  - Numerous types of lumber: hardboard, structural plywood, structural panels, structural composite lumber, oriented strand board, glue laminated lumber, prefabricated wood I-joists, finger-jointed lumber, and wood packaging (including pallets, crates, spools, and dunnage).
  - Windows that contain less than 5% composite wood by volume
  - Exterior doors and garage doors that contain less than 3% composite wood by volume

Enforcement

The law will be enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Implementation

There should be no challenges to implementing this law. Designers and owners are not responsible for compliance and do not need to make any changes to their specifications. The presence of the new federal standards should make it easier to obtain composite wood products with no added urea-formaldehyde and thus facilitate achievement of the LEED point associated with composite wood products.
Building products suppliers and contractors that sell or supply wood products should expect to receive compliant products from manufacturers after the EPA rules go into effect. Refer to the rules for more detail on how the law may apply to these and other sectors downstream from manufacturing.