



## ALGONQUIN ECO WATCH GROUP

### "THE USE OF PRESSURE TREATED LUMBER"

This new "walkway" (left) over a drainage on the Head Lake Portage, is built of pressure treated lumber, while the old "walkway" was built of local materials.

The use of pressure treated lumber (PTL) became increasingly common in recent decades, for the building of outdoor structures such as decks, picnic tables and docks. It has also been used in Algonquin Park for the construction and replacement of walkways and bridges on hiking trails and portages.



The Head Lake portage.

The purpose of pressure treatment is to inject preservatives into the wood that will protect it from invasion by insects, fungi and molds, particularly in the moist and wet situations that are often encountered in the bush. Wood preservation is accomplished by destroying those creatures through the use of such chemicals as arsenic, a highly toxic substance.

Tests have shown that arsenic can exit PTL simply by rubbing, or through contact with water, prompting cities such as Ottawa to seriously consider banning it's use in playground equipment.

Should PTL be used in a natural environment park such as Algonquin, when locally occurring Ontario white cedar is available, which is naturally resistant to water damage without the use of preservatives?

Points To Consider:

**Economic:** Algonquin Eco Watch (AEW) has learned that in general, PTL is likely to cost approximately 80% as much as local (Ottawa Valley) white cedar.

**Longevity:** A building contractor, interviewed by AEW, feels that local cedar will outlast PTL, since the latter wood often "checks", admitting moisture to the untreated portions resulting in premature deterioration. This might at least partially offset the purchase price differential.

**Transportation:** White cedar is estimated to be generally about half the weight of pressure treated spruce or pine. Since Ontario Parks often flies material to the site via helicopter, e.g. the Head Lake portage, transportation costs would be reduced proportionately through the use of cedar. If however, as some people contend, cedar has less tensile strength than Pressure Treated Wood, this could warrant the use of dimensionally larger cedar, thereby increasing its transportation costs.

Safety: Some individuals feel that PTL becomes more "slippery" when wet, than does natural cedar. While this has not been verified objectively, if true it could lead to personal injury.

In view of the above, Algonquin Eco Watch urges Ontario Parks to henceforth use only white cedar, rather than Pressure Treated Wood on trail and portage maintenance in Algonquin Park.

As a result of direct communication, Mr. John Winters, Algonquin Park Superintendent made the following comments:

- " As a principle, Ontario Parks should not be using products that are environmentally unfriendly-this includes treated lumber."
- "My instructions to our staff will be to use alternate materials unless there is some compelling reason why that is not possible."