

# What You Need to Know about Blue-Stained Lumber

Component manufacturers at several recent WTCA chapter meetings have raised the topic of blue-stained lumber, wondering what causes it and whether it negatively impacts lumber's strength. The following summary from the Southern Pine Council (SPC) contains some useful information all manufacturers concerned about this stained lumber should know. (For the complete SPC Q&A and pictures, visit **Support Docs** at [www.sbcmag.info](http://www.sbcmag.info).)



Photo courtesy of the Southern Pine Council, [www.southernpine.com](http://www.southernpine.com).

## What makes the lumber blue?

Blue stain is a common cause for the discoloration of lumber. Certain dark-colored microscopic fungi cause a bluish or grayish discoloration in the sapwood of the tree. However, not all blue stains are blue. Other stain shades can be blue, bluish black, gray, brown, red, yellow, orange, or purple.

## Does it affect the strength properties?

Blue stain has no effect on the performance and strength of lumber. Structural lumber is not downgraded due to the presence of blue stain and should not be labeled inferior lumber.

## Where can blue-stained lumber be used?

Because blue stain does not detract from the strength properties of dimension lumber, blue-stained lumber can be used for exactly the same purpose as non-stained lumber.

## What is it...blue stain or mold?

Blue stain is not mold. However, for a simple test to determine whether or not a piece of lumber is blue-stained or growing mold, lightly rub the affected surface of the wood. Mold grows on the surface and can be brushed off or smeared, whereas blue stain penetrates deep into the wood and cannot be removed.

## What about health and safety concerns?

Blue stain poses no health risk, and blue-stained lumber is safe to handle.

## Does blue stain cause decay?

Blue stain is not a decay fungi. Blue stain fungi live on the nutrients stored in the cells of the wood, not on the cellulose fibers of the tree itself.

## Why may I see more stained lumber than previously?

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita damaged the forest resources along the Gulf Coast. As salvage operations begin to recover downed timber, the lumber manufactured may contain a natural discoloration that begins after trees are severed or damaged. Combined with the devastation Hurricane Ivan caused in 2004, a larger proportion of blue-stained lumber will likely enter Southern Pine lumber markets.

## Can stained lumber be pressure-treated?

Blue stain fungi have no effect on the treatability of Southern Pine lumber and stained lumber may be treated to guard against decay and termites. **SBC**

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