

## Commentary &amp; Features

# Disposal of wood residue ... Things to note

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**D**ISPOSAL of wood waste in particular sawdust, is a serious environmental problem in areas of Ghana where timber milling is the dominant industrial activity.

Presently, mill owners spend scarce resources in hiring trucks to dispose of sawdust in Ghana. Aside of the expenditure, location and acquisition of a dumping site is a problem. It is disheartening to observe fresh sawdust being dumped close to water bodies such as ponds, streams and rivers.

In the rural areas, rivers and ponds are sources of drinking water for the inhabitants. Natural chemicals present in wood together with industrial compounds such as preservatives render water sources unsafe and pose health hazard to range, wildlife and humans.

Wood residue has the tendency of causing silting in ponds and rivers. River beds shielded by wood particles become inaccessible to aquatic creatures which lay their eggs in the soil of the river beds. Thus dumping of fresh wood particles in water bodies tend to destroy the natural environment for aquatic life. This is due to the fact that fresh wood residue takes a longer time to decay in water as compared to all other types of organic waste.

A large quantity of good fibre wood residue is burnt at the timber mills in Ghana. Some of these mills are located in settlement areas forming homes and schools for humans. Smoke produced in such burning activities pose a health hazard to humans and domesticated animals.

The Ghana National Fire Service is one organisation that has never been able to stop any fire outbreak without extensive damage to life and property. Say this not at Obuasi. Tell it not in the Brong Ahafo Region. Thus burning of solid wood waste in the premises of timber milling companies becomes a potential source of industrial fire hazard.

Where there is abundance of land, solid wood residue is piled up in cities and towns, and at times left to rot. These dumping grounds provide favourable environmental conditions for the breeding of dangerous reptiles such as snakes; and poisonous insects such as scorpions and centipedes.

There is hope that timber residue would be used efficiently in Ghana, one day. In other parts of the world, the type of wood thrown away in Ghana is used in the production of numerous value added products

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such as oriented strandboard, glued laminated timber, waferboard and fibre reinforced plastics.

Whilst we continue to find environmentally friendly ways of wood residue utilisation in Ghana, it is important for us to remember that "wood is a natural reservoir of chemical energy". The specific heat capac-

ity of wood is high, taking a value of  $3.24 \times 10^{-1} \text{ Cal/g. } ^\circ\text{C}$  at a temperature of  $50 \text{ } ^\circ\text{C}$ .

Domestic and industrial fire outbreaks are the most dangerous calamities caused by inappropriate disposal of wood residue. It is true that some cargo trucks transporting charcoal from the production site to the urban area got totally burnt by the charcoal being transported.

The dry and cold season of harmattan a regular visitor of the dwellers within and around the Saharan has been with us again. What news has it brought? By the end of February 6, 1997, six Ghanaians had lost their lives in two villages of the Brong Ahafo Region, through fire outbreaks.

In the absence of an efficient fire service, Ghanaians should take proper care of the environment as regards wood residue and fire. In order to prevent further fire outbreaks at wood processing factories, mill managers are encouraged to organise cleaning exercises in the yards of sawmills, veneer mills, furniture factories, etc.

An idea of forming a mobile "fire prevention campaign group" to educate industrialists, villagers and townfolk is hereby, being put across. A good education on the causes and consequences of fire outbreaks would enable dwellers in farm settlement areas to clean their surroundings against fire. Such settlers can plan and watch their homes during the day, a time when almost everybody would want to be working on the farm. Let us care for our children.

While the harmattan is still here, let us all work towards the prevention of fire! Burning wood can be devastating!

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