

WOODPECKER DAMAGE TO WOOD

Wood, including power transmission poles, sawn lumber and plywood, is occasionally attacked by woodpeckers. Most of these attacks occur in rural areas, particularly wooded areas, where the woodpeckers are normally found.

Some ornithologists have described the pecking on buildings, television antennas, and similar objects as a means for woodpeckers to establish their territories. Others believe that particular sounds generated by the birds pecking in some way encourage them to continue the pecking activity. Still others attribute pecking to part of the mating process and to food-gathering activities. The damage usually occurs in specific seasons, since woodpeckers are migratory.

Efforts to produce a woodpecker-proof wood product have not been successful or economically feasible. Experience and research have indicated that the only realistic way to deal with the problem is to develop techniques or devices which will discourage woodpeckers from attacking wood and plywood in the first place.

Woodpeckers may attack wood, or even metal, regardless of whether the surface of the material being pecked has voids or gaps in it. The fact that insects may have burrowed into the wood may or may not be the primary cause for woodpecker damage. In areas known to be frequented by woodpeckers, however, potential plywood damage may be prevented in some cases by plugging or sealing exposed openings in the grooves (crossband gaps) with a wood putty at the time of panel installation. It is recommended that the builder or homeowner follow this practice if he is building or living in an area that woodpeckers visit. Such plugging should eliminate the intrusion of insects into the plywood, which may be the cause of woodpecker attraction and attack. When insects are already present, there may be chemical sprays, which can be utilized to free plywood of insects. Check with local building suppliers for available and safe sprays. Nests can also be destroyed with a long, thin instrument, such as a stiff wire.

Another method that has been reported for discouraging woodpeckers is the use of owl decoys. Owls are a natural enemy of woodpeckers. In the state of Washington, a homeowner purchased two plastic owl decoys from a sporting goods store and installed them during the woodpecker season with complete success. He hung the owls by wire from screw eyes on each gable end of the house so that they were free to move in any breeze. He reported that he had no damage whatsoever from woodpeckers during subsequent seasons.

Other mechanical means have been applied successfully in the past, such as the use of white or metallic devices such as aluminum pie pans or strips of foil that move in the breeze. These can be strung in the areas of damage.

Noise is another means some people use to discourage woodpeckers from attacking wood. This includes loud whistles or horns.

Several means of repairing woodpecker damage on plywood siding have been used successfully. Small damaged areas can be patched with typical wood dough or plastic wood. For high-performance exterior durability in larger damaged areas, two-component systems are suggested. These include typical auto body putty available from automotive supply stores. These systems require measuring and mixing but can be applied with a spatula or putty knife. When repairs are made, care should be taken that the surface surrounding the damaged area is not smeared with the repair compound, which might unduly affect the appearance of the panel surface or the finish to be applied to it. Additional information on plywood repair may be found in APA Technical Note J805, Field Repairs of Plywood.

Technical Services Division

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