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# Oil palm trunks for timber?

MALAYSIA'S furniture industry, which is facing rubber wood shortage, may in the next five years use oil palm trunks as Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (Frim) works on the specifications and testings of the material.

Frim is one of the government agencies tasked to research into using natural resources more efficiently and turn what was previously considered waste like rubber wood into commercial timber.

Before rubber wood was introduced as a suitable raw ma-

terial to furniture makers, felled rubber trees were mainly used for firewood.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Frim managed to make rubber wood — initially a difficult wood to treat — a sought-after sawn timber for furniture.

Rubber wood is hard enough to be machine-friendly and soft enough to be moulded. Its pale colour and tight grain also gives good finishing quality.

Now, Frim is once again looking to turn waste into suitable raw material for furniture-making.

Yesterday, Frim's represent-

atives Datuk Dr Marzalina Mansor and Dr Wan Tarmeze Wan Ariffin presented their idea at a seminar hosted by the Malaysian Timber Council. They were, however, met with considerable scepticism from industry executives present at the event.

The general consensus was that oil palm trunks are susceptible to fungal and insect attacks due to their high sugar and starch content. In addition, their "soggy" characteristics mean they are not machine-friendly.

But an enterprise, My Wood

Resources Sdn Bhd, is willing to partner Frim.

At a press conference held in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, My Wood finance director Vincent Yong said his company plans to set up a RM50 million pilot plant with Frim to make trial lumber out of oil palm tree trunks.

Marzalina said the pilot plant will use US-patented technology called steam-pressed scrim lumber and diluted but tight-bonding glue.

My Wood and Frim are due to formalise their collaboration by the end of the year.