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FRIM offers world-class chemical-free rubber wood treatment

KUALA LUMPUR: Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) has successfully developed and patented a world-class green technology for treating rubber wood using high temperature drying (HTD), which eliminates the use of chemicals, enhances the timber stability and reduces the processing time.

"There is a lot of interest in the HTD system. We have received many enquiries especially from major rubber wood supplying countries such as China, Thailand and India," said FRIM Director General Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod in a statement Friday.

He said FRIM would conduct further research on the use of the HTD system on other timber species including Acacia and oil palm lumbers. "I believe the HTD system can also be applied for treating other timber species. This technology has the potential of making Malaysia among the first countries to offer safe, environmentally-friendly treated timber in the world," he added.

The HTD technology is the solution to the concerns of the country's rubber furniture manufacturers and timber trade industry over the

increasingly stringent requirements for environmentally-friendly products imposed by various developed countries.

FRIM obtained the patent for the HTD technology from the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) in March 2013 and it has also filed for patent in Malaysia and six other countries, namely Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, China and India.

The institute is working with Advanced Low Pressure System Sdn Bhd (ALPS) on the commercialisation of the HTD technology and the company has set up two units of the HTD system in Telok Gong, Port Klang.

FRIM will also work with the Malaysian Timber Industry Board and Malaysian Timber Council to organise a forum for representatives of the furniture and timber industry to promote the HTD system later this year. In conjunction with this, it will also launch the HTD certification mark.

The HTD system was developed and refined over the past 10 years by FRIM researchers, Choo Kheng Ten and Dr Sik Huei Shing, who embarked on the project in response to the European Union's (EU) call

for certain types of wood treatment chemicals, particularly borates, to be assigned to the 'Repro-toxic Category' under the Dangerous Substance Directive 67/548.

Rubber wood must be kiln-dried before being converted into furniture and/or its components. This is to ensure the timber remains dimensionally stable before being used in downstream manufacturing.

Over 90 per cent of the drying mills in this region use the conventional steam-heated system at temperatures below 80°C, and the wood has to be treated with preservatives such as borates to prevent fungi and pest attacks.

The HTD system not only eliminates the use of the preservatives but also reduced the processing cycle time by more than 75 per cent.

In addition, the quality of the HTD-treated lumber is generally good and has better dimensional stability compared with lumber produced by conventional methods.

Rubber wood furniture account for over 80 per cent of Malaysia's furniture export, and rubber wood constitutes nearly half of all timber used in the manufacture of furniture in Asia. - Bernama