

*Best wishes for you and your loved ones during the Christmas  
and festive season*



*Seënwense vir u en u geliefdes tydens die Kerstyd en fees  
seisoen*

# Newsletter 176

6 December 2011



Dear Members,

## **SEASONS GREETINGS AND DECEMBER OFFICE CLOSURE**

We have again come to the end of another year that seemed to have passed by in a blink of an eye. A year that had many challenges and difficulties, and some it seems may still be with us for some time to come. Those active in the creosote market will as a result of the shortages know exactly what we are referring to. On the positive side, I am sure that many will agree that it wasn't all doom and gloom. The wood preservation industry in South Africa can look back on a year where all indications are that the total volumes of timber treated were more than in 2010. We are aiming to publish the 2011 statistics midway through the first quarter of next year and this will hopefully give a true and actual reflection of the 2011 situation.

We would like to use this opportunity to wish all our members a very happy holiday season, a blessed Christmas and our very best wishes for the New Year. Those of you who will be traveling please take care and drive safely.

Please note that the SAWPA offices will be closing on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December and will reopen on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2012.

## **SAWPA 2012 CALENDAR**

The theme for our 2012 wall Calendar is outdoor decking. The calendars have been posted and members should have received theirs by now. Notify us if you did not receive a calendar. As part of our annual promotional campaign, calendars were also posted all over the country to architects, thatch roof builders, agricultural co-ops, etc.

## **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SANS STANDARDS**

The draft amendments to SANS 1288, SANS 754 and SANS 457-3 have all been finalised and have been or are soon to be circulated to the TC 218 members. These amendments will subsequently be circulated to all SAWPA members involved in the preservation of timber products falling within the scope of these standards. Members are requested to forward any comments (with motivation or reasons) to SAWPA by the date indicated in the e-mail from us (earlier than SABS closing date). SAWPA will then formulate its

official stance based on the comments received and submit its vote to the SABS TC 218 secretariat. The closing date for SANS 1288 is the 15<sup>th</sup> of December and members who still want to submit comments to SAWPA must do so by the 9<sup>th</sup> of December. The due dates for the other two standards will be from the middle towards the end of January as indicated in the notifications.

## TALKING ROT

- News worthy events/activities/articles: SAWPA would like to appeal to our members to inform us of any news worthy event or activities which members are involved in, e.g. building or development project were you were involved with as a supplier/contractor/sponsor etc. This will then be included in our newsletter to inform all our members of the interesting activities. Such articles can also be used in the quarterly Wood Foundation newsletter to inform other associated industry members on what's happening in the local timber preservation arena.
- Attached is an excellent article sourced from the October SA Forestry magazine titled ***“How Long is a piece of string? (or how much water does a gum tree use?)”***, which I am sure you will find interesting. It gives a good answer to a question the forestry and timber industry so often are confronted with and don't always have a clear-cut response.
- Members who have access to the internet can take the time to view the film clip “Wood – Natures stroke of genius” at the following link. It gives the simple facts on some of the incorrect and negative perceptions on forestry and the use of wood [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRwA291NAuM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRwA291NAuM)
- Hits to the SAWPA website during October and November were 17 285 and 22 497 respectively

## BRUCE BREEDT

SAWPA accepts no responsibility for any claim made in this newsletter.

# How long is a piece of string? (or how much water does a gum tree use?)



by Dave Dobson

It's early in the morning and I am serving my penance for trying to come up with a glib answer to a question from the editor of this fine magazine!

Roger Godsmark of Forestry South Africa got very excited recently when he came across an article in the Business Day stating that "unlike bamboo's 2 litres/day, eucalyptus trees use up to 200 litres/day". When editor Chris Chapman asked me how much water a gum tree actually uses, my facetious reply was 'how long is a piece of string'? Not a very clever answer, as he then asked me to explain myself in writing! Still, it got me thinking. More specifically, if I drove from Pietermaritzburg to Cape Town and told you I used 125 litres of fuel it wouldn't tell you how well I drove, but if I told you my fuel consumption was 8 litres per 100 kms it immedi-



ately gives an indication. The public debate around water use by gum trees is rather similar. Does the 200 litres/day that gum trees allegedly use refer to use by a single tree or by one hectare of trees? Can the water use by gum trees be compared with water used to produce other crops? How long is this piece of string?

There are plenty of academic articles written on water use by trees, but if you are like me, I start getting nervous when the authors start using terms like 'standard deviations' and 'coefficients' of variance.' In this day of tweeting and sound bites we need something short and pithy to make an impression. (That is why 200 litres/day sticks.)

My starting point in figuring out just how much water a gum tree uses, was a comment years ago made by Dolf Schonau, that the limiting factor in plantation growth in this country was moisture. The question then arises whether gum trees growing in the super drained soils at Eston producing a yield of 100 tons of fibre per hectare use the same amount of moisture as say gum trees growing at Boscombe and producing 220 tons of fibre per hectare. Obviously the answer is no, it is not possible. The amount of moisture available to the trees on each of these two sites is very different and this is reflected in their growth. So how does one come up with a comparison?

I then recalled a conversation with Peter Roberts, a past Director of the ICFR and a forest industry water guru. I had seen an article which listed some interesting figures providing global average water use requirements to produce some of the staples we eat, for example rice, wheat, potatoes and sugar. He kindly offered to extend the list for me but then being a true scientist started talking of 'blue water'

and 'green water'. My brain went into academic freeze! Still, Peter is a patient man and he quietly talked me through my panic! Blue water, by the way, refers to runoff and green water to evapo-transpiration. He then produced the following table for me, which I duly scribbled down. It is this table which produced the eureka moment and enabled me to come up with a comparable and sensible water use for the gum tree.

The numbers are based on 'blue water' i.e. runoff reduction, which is the yardstick used for water consumption for commercial forests.

So maybe this is the figure (36 litres/1 kg fibre) we should be using in our comparisons. It makes sense and puts the water use debate into some perspective.

Now, as I mentioned at the beginning of this exercise, I started early, so it's time for some breakfast. How about that bacon and eggs with toast and a little butter. Perhaps add a glass of fruit juice. Hmm... and the water required to produce such a meal? You can do the sums yourself! ■

## Comparative water uses

Water requirement (litres)	To produce
22	1 serving of lettuce
36	1 kg eucalypt fibre
53	1 orange
200	1 kg rice
250	1 pint milk
450	1 egg
500	1 kg potatoes
550	1 loaf bread
780	1 litre of fruit juice
18 000	1 kg butter

## Constraints, challenges and opportunities

**"We've got the money – we need the right projects to fund" – IDC's Manoj Seonath**

An IDC-hosted meeting between stakeholders of the forestry and wood product sectors identified a number of constraints and challenges, but also a host of exciting opportunities for those prepared to view the glass as 'half-full' rather than 'half-empty'.

The South African forestry and wood products value chain is faced with a number of constraints and challenges, but these simply have to be overcome in order to take advantage of the opportunities that are there for the taking.

This was the gist of the discussion at a workshop hosted by the Industrial Development Corporation's KwaZulu-Natal office, attended by representatives from the forestry, sawmilling, furniture and paper manufacturing sectors.

Roger Godsmark of Forestry SA identified land reform as the biggest challenge facing the forestry sector. He said that government would not be funding any new projects, and that any available funds would be used to recapitalise failed land reform projects.

He said that currently, there was more land lost to forestry than was being replaced by new afforestation, which was hampered by lengthy and costly licencing applications and other policy impediments.

Meanwhile, he said MTO was battling to get permits to plant those areas that were supposed to be taken out of forestry as part of Safcol's excision policy.

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