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A TECHNOLOGICAL ANSWER?

The growth of prefinished hardwood plywood paneling has been characteristic of the classical market cycle of a product. The introduction stage occurred during the 1950's. A period of rapid growth followed during the late 1950's and 1960's culminating in the consumption of approximately 5.5 billion sq. ft. surface measure in 1972. Consumption dropped sharply in 1973 and 1974, and the annual use of this product has remained in a rather narrow range band of between 3.0 and 3.6 billion sq. ft. surface measure. Prefinished hardwood plywood paneling may have reached the mature stage in the life cycle of a product.

Ominous as it sounds, the mature stage may be largely bypassed, as the product could enter a stage of market decline. Several important pressures have been building. Much of the growth of the product was the result of the use of relatively low cost and high quality tropical hardwood panels imported from Southeast Asia. These panels are subsequently factory finished in the United States and Canada. Lauan and other tropical hardwoods are no longer inexpensive and no longer readily available. Demand from Europe and the OPEC countries and that stimulated by growing economies of the Asian countries themselves have left the United States as just another customer for this product.

Potential regulations have created other pressures. The concern about national fire losses has led to a number of actions some of which focus on the use of combustible products in building structures. The National Bureau of Standards has recently completed a series of large-scale burnout tests in mobile homes conducted over the past four years. In the summary report to this work, the recommendations made to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development call for a reduction of surface flamespread of interior finish in mobile homes through a series of three "design options." Perhaps just as serious is the issue involving the real or perceived problem of low concentrations of formaldehyde in dwellings and mobile homes.

These pressures may be temporary or ballooned out of proportion. They may be solved by time and the normal response mechanisms. It is possible that an extension in product technology could also be the agent of rescue. Wood composition boards designed to be used as a core in 3-ply wall panel construction and printing substrates of wood composition board could provide, at least, a theoretical answer. Can such products be manufactured with suitable linear expansion properties, containing integral mixed fire retardant agents with the particles, and bonded with low or nonemitting adhesives?

Wood composition board wall panels have, in recent years, become an important product in the do-it-yourself market. Can the future evolution of this

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A Technological Answer?

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product be accelerated? Can this acceleration provide for feasible wood composition board and veneer, wood composition board composite products for mobile home and new construction markets?

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