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METRIC CONVERSION

Conversion to the metric or "international system" was a major topic at meetings of the International Organization for Standardization held 4-14 September 1973 in Washington, D.C. "The World Going Metric—Impact on International Standardization" was the title of the opening session. Department of Commerce Secretary F. B. Dent reported the Administration's recommended legislation to change to the metric system.

Federal and private standards agency effort to publicize and stimulate public interest in metric conversion will undoubtedly be intensified in the coming months and affirmative action on one or more of the numerous metric bills can be anticipated in the spring of 1974.

Most explanations of the need for metric conversion tend to be general and ignore the very real disruptions likely to occur on an intra- and inter-industry basis. Nowhere are the prospects for such disruptions more evident than in the structural applications of lumber and wood products—where product sizes must be modular to provide for convenient breakdown of the log; where tradition tends to impede changes in product size to meet end-use requirements; where engineering and architectural design are performed independently of the manufacturing process and where modular dimensioning and spacing of the materials must be compatible with a myriad of other building products.

As an example of the rather superficial nature of current metric system promotion, the Metric Reporter of the ANSI American National Metric Council states the following as reasons for making the metric system predominant in the United States:

Every other major industrial nation has already adopted the international metric system or is in the process of doing so. It is an obvious disadvantage in world trade to be out of step with everyone else.

The metric system is simple, being based on multiples of ten like the U.S. currency. It is estimated that considerable classroom time will be saved in teaching the metric rather than the customary system of weights and measures.

Recognizing the need to assess the real impact of metric change on the wood products industry and to plan an orderly approach for the wood industry, a Task Group on Metric Conversion of the National Forest Products Association's Technical Advisory Committee has proposed the following courses of action:

1. Individual species and product associations and agencies should begin immediate study of how "soft" conversion can best be accomplished. This would involve direct translation of present product sizes and rounding to the nearest metric unit.
2. Study of the relative advantages of "hard" conversion should be initiated by a task group of the Technical Advisory Committee. Study results would be submitted to the species and product line associations and agencies for consideration as alternatives to "soft" conversion. ("Hard conversion" contemplates size changes to improve the efficiency or economy of the product and to permit use of even metric units.)
3. When a wood industry position favoring either the "soft" or "hard" method of con-

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