

## GUIDANCE NOTE

Ref: WPA TW 13

Issue 1: June 2021

# Installing Preservative Treated Timber Fence Posts

## Best Practice Guidance

### Buying Treated Wood

The information in this Guidance Note applies to both ROUND and SQUARE sawn softwood posts, pre-treated with a preservative for fencing applications.

Consumer and contract law require that any product offered for sale must be fit for its intended use and a wood product impregnated with preservative is no exception. The minimum standards for the treatment of wood are set out in *British Standard BS 8417* and the *WPA Code of Practice - Industrial Wood Preservation* (January 2021). In these standards the level of treatment is tailored to the application 'Use Class' of a wood product.

**Use Class 4** is for end uses where wood is in contact with or very close to the ground and frequently wet.

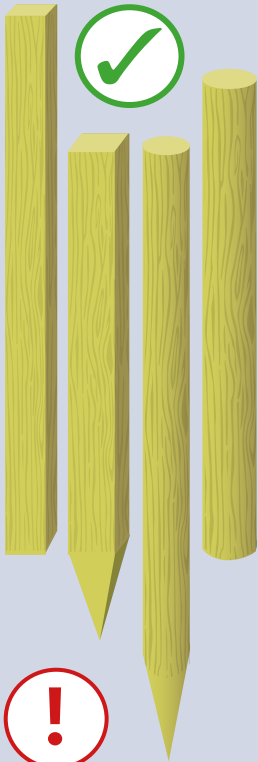
**DO NOT** substitute wood that has been treated for an **indoor** application for use in an **external** application – **failure is inevitable**.

For wood in permanent ground or fresh water contact, or providing exterior structural support, Use Class 4 levels of protection **MUST** be achieved. *Anything less and service life, structural safety and customer satisfaction will be compromised.*



For further information, please refer to WPA Guidance Note TW8: Understanding Use Class 4 preservative treated wood.

**Make sure**  
**it's Use Class 4**  
**GROUND CONTACT**



It is important to remember that the preservative penetration achieved by brush application is less than that achieved in the industrial treatment process, so it is best to avoid or minimise reworking where possible.

### Preparing for Installation

All pre-treated wood products are impregnated in their **finished form** and are designed to be installed **without modification**.

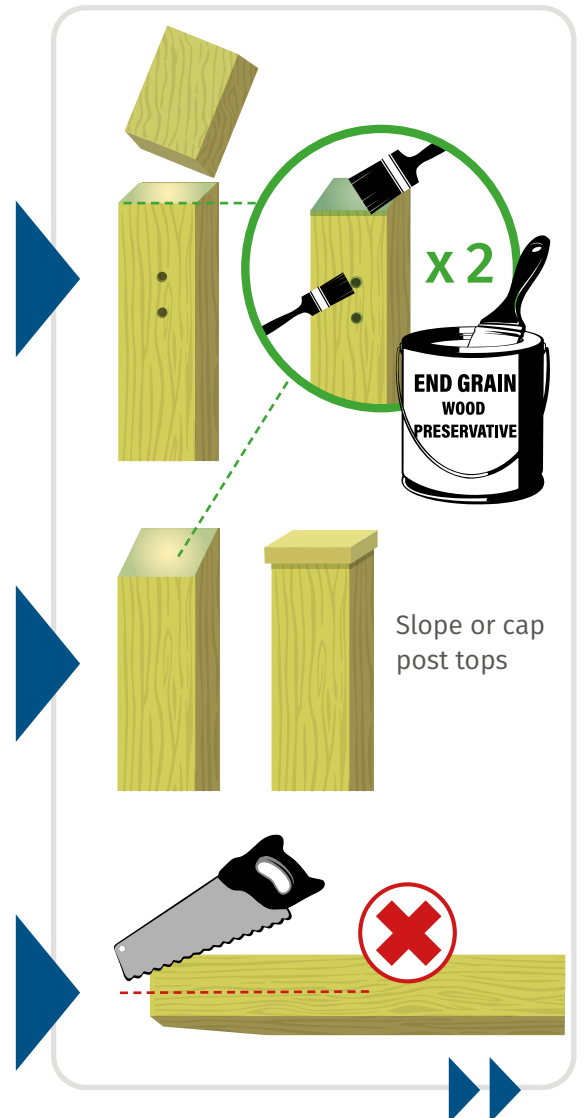
For this reason, re-working a pre-treated post at the installation site should be avoided and limited to **cross cutting, boring, drilling or notching**.

Any new **exposed surfaces** should be given **two liberal brush coats of a suitable end grain wood preservative**, as recommended by the manufacturer of the industrial wood preservative used in the original treatment.

IF cut to height, the tops of posts should either be **cut at an angle** to shed water or, if practical, fitted with a **cap** to reduce water penetration into the end grain.

Remember to always **protect the cut end** with two liberal brush coats of a suitable preservative.

**Treated wood must NEVER be rip sawn along its length.**



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### Good Installation Practice

The **cross-cut end** of a treated post must **NEVER** be embedded in the ground, *even if an end grain preservative has been applied*.

**Mechanical incising** of the surface is now used widely to help achieve the desired penetration. Some fence posts only have incising along part of their length and, in such circumstances, the **incised end of the post** must be placed in the ground.

Posts must **not be hammered** into place unless the ground is known to be soft enough for this process not to **damage the post** and/or the integrity of the envelope of preservative protection.

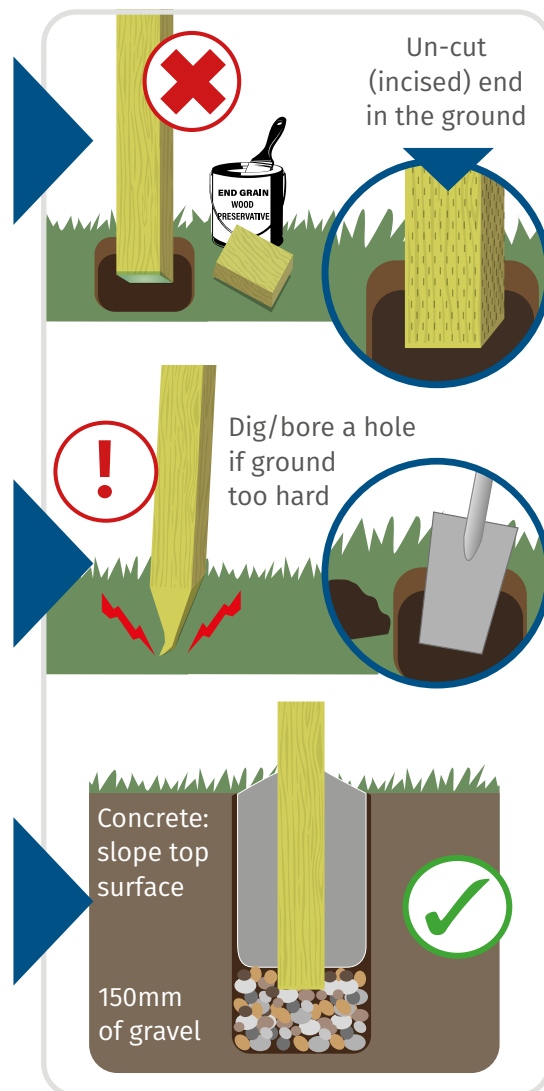
If using a cement-based mix to fix posts in the ground, ensure that **water can drain away** from the foot of the post. DO NOT make a 'boot' for a post out of concrete as this will keep the bottom of a post wet for long periods and increase the risk of decay. Instead, **add 150mm of gravel** to the bottom of the hole for drainage.

If back-filling with concrete/post-mix then always finish the mix level **above ground** and **slope the top surface** of the concrete to shed water away from the post.

Preservative penetration requirements can be difficult to achieve in resistant species such as spruce or where there is a heartwood penetration requirement (*even for permeable species such as pine*).

Where the ground is not soft enough, a hole of a suitable size should be bored before installation to avoid damaging the post and so reducing its service life

Tests show different preservatives may react differently with components in cement and preservative suppliers should be consulted for specific advice on use of cement when installing treated posts.



Illustrations not to scale

### Follow the Ground Rules

Suppliers and users of treated wood fencing can help promote quality in the sector by supporting the WPA's **Make Sure it's 4** campaign – raising awareness of the need for correct specification for ground contact timber. To ensure best value for money and long service life, follow the three **Ground Rules**:



**Specify Use Class 4** levels of preservative treatment – anything less and service life, structural safety and customer satisfaction will be compromised.



**Use a trusted treater** who has third party accreditation of their operational quality management systems – such as the **WPA Benchmark Scheme**.



**Be prepared to pay for quality** – premium products incur higher costs but their inherent value is priceless when performance in the field is paramount.



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