

2018 International Building Code® (IBC®) adjustments for Fire-Retardant-Treated Wood

Viance wants to make you aware of some significant adjustments to the language in the soon to be published 2018 International Building Code® (IBC®) related to Fire Retardant Treated Wood (FRTW). Section 2303.2.2 has been revised to clarify that fire-retardant wood products must be **impregnated with chemicals** to be code compliant and considered as an FRTW product, even if that happens by means other than the pressure process. Currently the wording in the 2012 and 2015 codes; “the treatment shall be an integral part of the manufacturing of the wood product”, has been misconstrued to mean that FRTW products do not have to be impregnated with chemicals.

The 2018 IBC code has also provided an update clarification at the end of the FRTW section that states: **“The use of paints, coating, stains or other surface treatments are not an approved method of protection as required in this section.”**

The IBC’s new definition of FRTW is “any wood product ... **impregnated with chemicals by a pressure process**” with a listed flame spread index of 25 or less and with no evidence of significant progressive combustion”. Code compliant FRTW must meet and pass a 30-minute fire test in accordance with ASTM E84 or UL723 that is extended for an additional 20 minutes during the fire testing.

Previously section 2303.2.2 of the IBC was unclear and some product manufacturers took advantage of this ambiguity and marketed surface-applied paint or stain products as fire-retardant-treated wood, even though the treatment is only on the surface of the wood. Many areas of the country have accepted these various coated products for use in Type I, II and III buildings, and structures have been constructed with surface-coated treatments that local code officials and contractors believed was FRTW. The modified code language code makes it very clear that if the FRTW is not pressure impregnated with chemicals, it simply is not code compliant.

It is important to communicate these changes to retailers, lumberyards, building code officials so they are informed and do not allow the sale of, or approve non-compliant FRTW. Users of FRTW should also be encouraged to carefully inspect product labels and stamps on FRTW, as deceptive products often do not have labels or stamps at all or have stamps that appear legitimate, until they are compared with the labeling requirements outlined in the building codes.

The scope of the International Building Code (IBC) includes all buildings except detached one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses up to three stories, and is in use or adopted by all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. The 2018 IBC codes are currently under evaluation by multiple states and jurisdictions engaged in the adoption of the new IBC codes in 2018.