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One Fine Day in the Lumber Yard

Doug Stokke
Iowa State University

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Student Articles

Writing is an important part of an ISU Forester's education. Students spend much time and effort on the papers they write as evidenced by the following examples. The first was written for a Pest Management class. The second was a Pack Essay winner.

One Fine Day in the Lumber Yard

by Doug Stokke

"Take a trip to the lumber yard and look for wood defects," instructed Dr. McNabb. The class looked less than thrilled, and I myself was no exception. Little did I know that I would soon be conducted on a guided tour highlighting the wood defects at Schoeneman's Lumber Yard.

I arrived at the yard on a clear, crisp morning, and after I had checked in with the yard boss, I wandered out into the yard. As I neared the first storage shed, a small voice called out.

"Psst, hey buddy, over here."

I turned and looked but saw nothing. "Must be the wind," I mumbled to myself.

Again the voice called out. "Hey, bud, you're looking for wood defects, right?"

"Who said that?" I demanded.

"I did, stupid. Over here by the steps."

I looked, but still didn't see anyone, at least not at first. When I did spot him, I could hardly believe my eyes. There, peering out from beneath some wooden steps, was a little green man, only three inches tall.

"Who are you, anyway," I exclaimed, still in disbelief.

"Allow me to introduce myself," said the little man. "My business card."

With that, he held out a tiny card, which I took from him. I squinted hard to read the miniscule print.

The card looked something like this:

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*****
Lentinus D. Punctatum
Professional Wood Rotter Association
Local 632
"WE SPECIALIZE
IN ALL TYPES OF WOOD DECAY"
*****
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"What is this, anyway," I said. "This has to be some sort of joke."

"Not at all, my boy," said Mr. Punctatum. "I'm really quite serious about my business."

"And just what is your business?"

"Just like the card says, I'm a professional wood rotter."

"Oh come on now, wood isn't decayed by little green men."

"No, you're right there, my boy, but it's my job to see that the industry progresses, so to speak. In other words, I made sure that rot occurs wherever it is justified. Now, why don't you just allow me to show you some of the work I've been involved with here."

"Well, alright," I said, still quite skeptical of this little man, who I now imagined must only be the result of something I ate.

"We'll start off by looking over the dimension stock over here. There's some good stuff in there. First off, look at all of the blue stain. We're rather proud of that because it affects the sapwood of almost all commercial species. You'll notice that it occurs in spots, patches, or streaks. You'll see it all over in this yard."

"Big deal," I said, "Blue stain doesn't hurt wood much as far as changing its mechanical properties."

"Well, at least it's prolific," responded Lentinus. "So, you want to see something destructive, eh. Look at that brown, cube-like, crumbly wood there. It's dry rot. And how about that pecky rot on those two-by-fours? That happened while the wood was still in the tree."

"What about this stack of 'inch boards'?"

"Well, my boy, you'll notice a lot of sticker stain on these hardwoods, and some brown stain on these softwood boards. We get those in the dry kiln or during air drying by oxidizing certain substances in the wood."

"I'll bet you're not so successful over in this section," I said, motioning to the building where the treated lumber was stored.

"No," Lentinus sighed, "About all we've been able to do with that lumber so far is create a few seasoning checks and splits in the wood."

"And here's another place where you've been stopped," I said gleefully as I pointed to the cedar and redwood.

"You're right, boy, those natural extractives sure keep me from getting the job done," moaned the little gremlin.

"What about insect damage?" I asked.

"Once in a while you'll see lumber that was attacked by wood boring insects and the like. It shows up as grooves in otherwise smoothly machined wood."

"You mean like this," I said, picking up the end of an affected two-by-six.

"That's right."

"All in all, I'd say you're behind in your work around here, Mr. Punctatum. Looks like there aren't too many serious problems in this lumber yard."

"I guess you're right, boy. You know, they just don't give us much of a chance, what with keeping this lumber dry, off the ground, and stacked so that air can circulate around it. Under these conditions, it's mighty hard to decay wood."

"Well, if it's sympathy you want, you won't get any from me, Punctatum. If I know anything about you wood rotters at all, I know that you don't give up."

"You're right there, boy," grinned Mr. Punctatum as I turned to leave. "Ya'll come back and visit me again, okay? Maybe I'll have some really rotten wood for you the next time."

I didn't even stop to wave goodbye. I knew the little critter wasn't kidding. ■

