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U. S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
FOREST PRODUCTS LABORATORY

In cooperation with the University of Wisconsin
MADISON, WISCONSIN

R 778

**THE LEACHING OF ZINC CHLORIDE
FROM TREATED WOOD**

By **ERNEST BATEMAN**
Chemist in Forest Products

Published in
AMERICAN RAILWAY ENG. ASSN. Vol. 22 No. 227
1920

THE LEACHING OF ZINC CHLORIDE FROM TREATED WOOD*

By

Ernest Bateman, Chemist

Forest Products Laboratory,¹ Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

In the treatment of wood with inorganic salts as a wood preservative, the most important factor which controls the length of life of the preservative is its permanence in the wood in a toxic condition. There are three methods by which the toxic effect of inorganic salts may be reduced. These are:

1. Leaching of the salt with water, thus removing considerable portions of the preservative from the wood.
2. Loss of salt by volatilization.
3. Decomposition of the salt with the removal of the toxic ion by leaching or with the removal of the nontoxic ion in such a manner as to leave the toxic ion bound up in an insoluble form and hence nontoxic.

All of these conditions are known to take place in actual practice.

Of the three methods, the second, that of volatilization, is of the least importance in inorganic salts because as a rule such salts are not volatile. The only commercial inorganic preservative which is effected in this manner is mercuric chloride and in this case the disappearance of the toxic effect may be due to a combination of both the second and third methods; that is, actual loss by volatilization and decomposition from the mercuric to the mercurous salt. In practice the greatest stress is usually laid on leaching of the preservative and the possibility of decomposition seems to have been nearly forgotten. That this

*American Railway Engineering Assoc., Bul. 22, 1920.

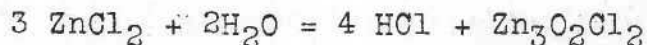
¹Maintained at Madison, Wis., in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin.

method of failure of the preservative is important is shown by the failure of wood treated with a solution of calcium cresylate. When this salt is exposed to the atmosphere, calcium carbonate is formed and cresol is obtained in a free condition; this being both volatile and soluble in water soon disappears from the wood.

On account of the prominence given to the leaching of a preservative, several processes have been patented to overcome this undesirable feature in the treatment with zinc chloride, such as the Wellhouse process and B. M. Preservative. One of the tests used at the Forest Products Laboratory to determine the efficiency of a wood preservative is the ease with which inorganic salts leach from wood. These tests are carried out by treating sections of noble fir 2 by 2 by 18 inches with a solution of the various salts and then cutting each section into three pieces 2 by 2 by 6 inches; each piece was then submerged in water for a period of 28 days, the water being changed from time to time. The solutions were then analyzed for their content of preservative and the loss by leaching calculated in percentage of the total amount in the piece. The results of these tests seem to indicate that under this method of testing all inorganic salts leach at about the same rate. Calculations show that with the exception of perhaps sodium fluoride, all woods treated with a preservative would have enough moisture in them under normal conditions (air-dry) to keep any commercial treatment of salts in solution. If this is the case, then the relative leaching of any salt will not be dependent upon the solubility unless a saturated solution is used, but will depend upon the rate of diffusion and probably upon the species of wood used.

Leaching of Zinc Chloride

Zinc chloride is now and has been for some years the most important inorganic wood preservative in commercial use. In the past several small samples of rotten wood have been received at the Laboratory which, on analysis, were found to contain a very high per cent of zinc. This led us to believe that the zinc must have been rendered nontoxic and it seems probable that this might have been due to the hydrolysis of the zinc chloride. It is well known that on dilution of solutions of zinc chloride, a precipitation of basic zinc chloride takes place in general agreement with the equation



or some other basic chloride of the same general formula so that it seems likely that some such a reaction may take place in the wood during service. Eventually all of the zinc left in the wood would be in the form of a basic chloride, so insoluble that it should not have a very toxic effect. If this hypothesis is correct, we ought to be able to get a measure of this action by a careful determination of both the zinc and chlorine which are leached out of wood by a leaching method. The following experimental work was undertaken along the lines suggested.²

²This work was done in this Laboratory by Mr. C. A. Fourness and submitted to the University of Wisconsin as his Bachelor's thesis.

Experimental

Nine matched pieces of clear hemlock 8 by 1-3/4 by 2 inches were treated for 1/2 hour under 120 pounds pressure at 60° C. with a 1, 3, and 5 per cent solution of zinc chloride. The pieces were then dried somewhat in the air. The solutions used were made up from a concentrated solution of anhydrous zinc chloride in water by diluting to the proper density. They were then filtered and analyzed for both zinc and chlorine by the usual volumetric methods. The results of these analyses are given in Table 1.

Table 1.--Concentration of treating solutions

Concen- tration of ZnCl ₂ solution:	Zinc	Chlorine	Excess chlorine over required amount for ZnCl ₂	Excess chlorine	Concen- tration of solution in HCl
Per cent:	Mg. per cc.	Mg. per cc.	Mg. per cc.	Per cent	Per cent
1.00	4.79	5.44	0.24	4.58	0.024
2.87	13.74	15.38	.48	3.22	.049
4.85	23.25	25.89	.67	2.66	.069

After drying five days the wood was placed in wide-mouthed glass-stoppered jars and submerged in 1300 to 1400 cc. of water. The water was changed in the following intervals:

<u>Leach No.</u>	<u>Time of leaching</u>
1	30 minutes
2	1 day
3	2 days
4	2 days
5	3 days
6	7 days
7	7 days
8	7 days
Total time.....	29 days

The volumes of the solutions were carefully determined and then analyzed for both chlorine and zinc. After leaching, the wood was dried in the oven and completely reduced to sawdust and analyzed for zinc. At that time no method of analysis of the wood for chlorine was available so the assumption was made that the chlorine entered into the wood in the same relative proportion to the zinc as was found in the treating solution. The results obtained were then calculated to a percentage basis and plotted in the form of curves. (Figs. 1, 2.)

Discussion of Results

The curves show that the chlorine leached out at a greater rate than the zinc. In Figure 1 the actual amounts of zinc and chlorine leached were 6.429 grams zinc and 9.879 grams of chlorine. This is 3.092 grams chlorine over that required for the ZnCl_2 leached and 2.67 grams chlorine in excess when the original acidity of the solution is taken into account. Similarly, the figures for the stick nearest the average in the other two solutions are 3.81 grams and 6.17 grams chlorine in excess of ZnCl_2 and 3.10 and 5.19 grams chlorine in excess when calculated back to the original acidity. It is very evident from the above that the chlorine leached more rapidly than the zinc. This is to be expected when we consider the fact that ZnCl_2 hydrolyzes with the formation of basic chlorides. The basic chlorides are indefinite compounds, being limited on one end by ZnCl_2 and the other by ZnO .

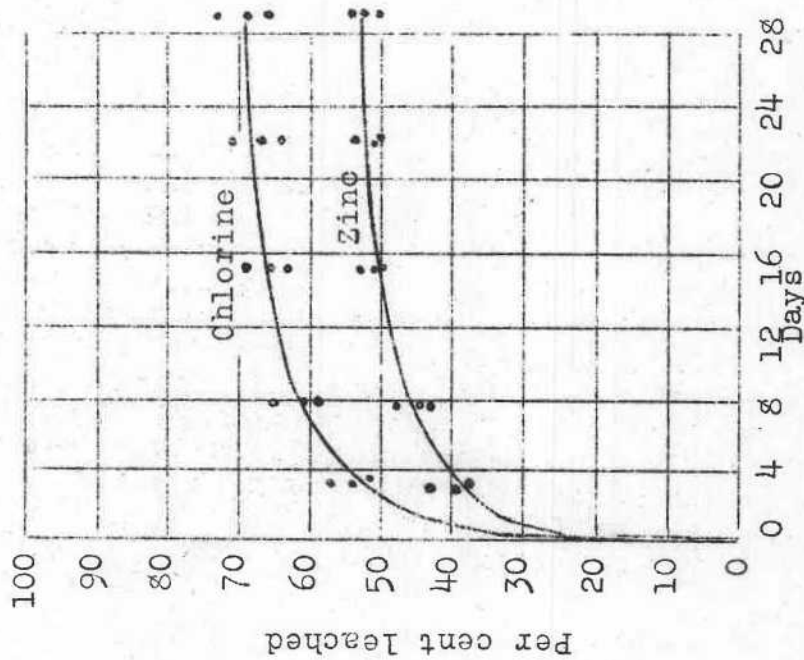


Figure 1.--Leaching of zinc and chlorine from wood treated with 1 per cent solution of zinc chloride

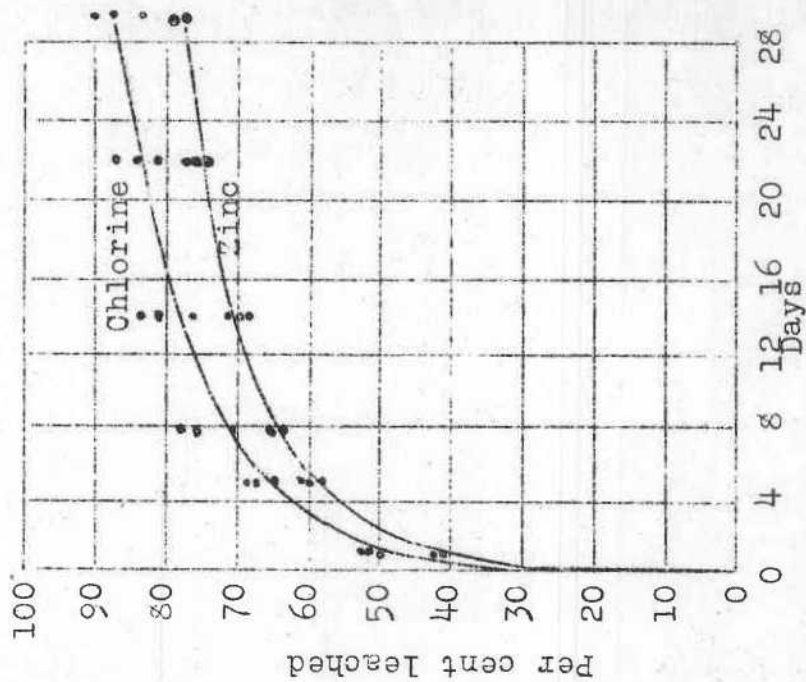


Figure 2.--Leaching of zinc and chlorine from wood treated with 4.85 per cent solution of zinc chloride

(Figures based on the amount of zinc and chlorine injected.)

The rate of leaching should be governed by the rate of diffusion of the salt used and possibly by some constant for the species of wood. If this is so, we ought to be able to calculate the amount of ZnCl_2 and HCl which would be leached, provided we know the rate of diffusion of the zinc chloride and hydrochloric acid. The value of the diffusion constant K of hydrochloric acid as given by Thov³ert² at 19.2° C.

³Landolt - Bornstein, Physikalisches Chemische Tabellen.

and 0.02 mol per liter is 2.12. No values are available for ZnCl_2 but it is known that, in general, the chlorides diffuse faster than the sulphates. Thov³ert² gives the value K for 0.55 mol ZnSO_4 per liter at 19.5° C. as 0.36 so that if we estimate this value as 0.5 for zinc chloride, we will probably be not far off from the truth. Using these values for K and calculating the amounts of zinc chloride and HCl which would diffuse for a 5 per cent solution in increments of 1 gram zinc chloride leached, we find that for 4 grams of zinc chloride to diffuse from 100 cc. of 5 per cent solution requires the diffusion of 0.26 gram HCl and the precipitation of 0.603 gram of zinc chloride, if we assume that the composition of the basic zinc chloride is $\text{ZnCl}_2 \cdot 5\text{ZnO}$ (Perrot). When this is calculated to a percentage basis and we take into consideration the excess acid originally present, we find that in order to diffuse 80 per cent of the zinc that 88.2 per cent of the chlorine should also diffuse. Practically, we obtained 89 per cent. This is a very fair agreement with the theoretical value and seems to indicate that the leaching of salts from wood under the conditions of the experiment is probably a diffusion phenomenon and, consequently, we should be able to foretell the rate of leaching of other salts from wood if we know the rate of diffusion in water and the constant for the species.

Leaching of Zinc Chloride Under Practical Conditions

It is of interest to apply this idea to the disappearance of zinc chloride from treated wood and to determine if the same effect takes place in actual service as is shown to have taken place in the Laboratory. Most, if not all wood treated with zinc chloride, is in the form of railroad ties. The condition of leaching here is somewhat different from that in the leaching experiments described above. In the Laboratory experiments the leaching out of the salt was

continuous; in service we have the following conditions. During wet weather leaching takes place with the result that basic zinc chloride is deposited in the tie. During dry weather moisture is evaporated, thus concentrating the solution, particularly near the surface. In concentration the free hydrochloric acid necessary to maintain an equilibrium at the lower concentration is now more than sufficient at the higher concentration. This excess acid is either taken up by redissolving any basic chloride which may be present or may be lost during the process of evaporation. We might expect, therefore, a result similar to that obtained by straight leaching with water, but requiring longer time to accomplish the same degree of leaching.

Analysis of Ties Treated with ZnCl_2

Description of ties.--In 1918 it was found necessary to remove, on account of splitting, tie No. 319 of the Hartford test track on the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. This tie was one of a number treated at this Laboratory in cooperation with the above railroad and placed in their track in August, 1911 for service test. The tie, although it was removed on account of splitting, was nevertheless decayed and two sections were sent to the Laboratory for analysis. The following is the treating record of this tie:

<u>Species</u>	<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Sapwood</u> Per cent	<u>Absorption (per</u> <u>cent dry salt)</u> Lbs. per cu.ft.
Hard maple	Burnett ⁴	89.4	0.61

⁴The Burnett treatment consists of a single injection with a solution of zinc chloride.

The results of the analyses of these ties proved to be of such interest that it was decided to corroborate the findings by other samples. Accordingly, in June, 1919, during the inspection of the test track of the Chicago and Northwestern near Janesville, Wisconsin, 10 other samples were taken. The condition of the ties was not such as to warrant their removal but in several places they were split

for one reason or another and where the split portion was not sustaining any of the burden, these portions were removed. These ties were treated experimentally by the Forest Service in cooperation with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad at Escanaba, Michigan. They were laid in the track in December, 1909. We have no individual treating record on them but only an average of the lot treated at one time. The description of the sample is given in Table 2.

Method of Examination

The method of sampling each section of tie No. 319 is shown in Plate 1 as well as a description of the physical condition of each portion taken for analysis. The specific gravity of each portion was determined. It was then reduced to sawdust and thoroughly shaken to insure a fair sample. Separate samples were then taken for the zinc and chlorine determinations. For the most part duplicate determinations were made. The zinc was determined according to the method devised by Bateman⁵ except that in a few cases it was found

⁵Jour. Ind. & Chem. Eng., Vol. 6, No. 1.

that the addition of fuming nitric acid reduced the time of digestion and decreased somewhat the amount of acids needed.

The following method of analysis was finally adopted for the chlorine:

Five grams of sawdust was placed in an iron crucible along with 20 cc. of concentrated caustic soda. This was gently heated with continual stirring on a sand bath until the water had been driven off and the caustic brought to the fusion point. Strict attention must be given it through the heating period; in the early stage of heating it is somewhat liable to spatter, while in the latter stage it foams badly and can only be controlled by stirring. The color of the mix is at first dark brown but gradually becomes much lighter and its consistency changes from that of moist meal to a heavy syrup. Beyond this the fusion becomes darker and granular. When this point was reached, 5 grams of chemically pure potassium nitrate was stirred into the fusion and after the glowing had ceased it was removed from the bath and allowed to cool. When cool it was taken up with water, neutralized with nitric acid and filtered. The chlorine was then determined in the filtrate by Volhard's method. Blank

Table 2.--Description of samples taken from Chicago and
Northwestern test track

Tie No.	Species	Proc- ess used in treat- ment	Num- ber of ties in treat- ment	Aver- age ab- sorp- tion ¹	Portion taken as sample	Remarks
200	Peeled hemlock	Well- house	40	0.43	Splinter 1x3x18" above ground; from end of tie.	Entirely sound. Rest of tie sound but bruised at end.
313	Peeled hemlock	Well- house	40	.39	Splinter 1x3x30" above ground; rail to center.	Sample sound. Small decayed portion under sample. Rest of tie sound.
486	Peeled tamarack	Bur- nett	125	.43	Splinter 3/4x2x24" from cen- ter of tie above ground.	Sample sound, broken off by bruise. Rest of tie sound.
527	Peeled tamarack	Bur- nett	125	.43	Splinter 1x4x18" from end to rail.	Sample slightly decayed. Rest of tie decayed near split.
657	Unpeeled tamarack	Bur- nett	125	.51	Splinter 3/4x2 1/2x 18"; from end to rail.	Sample sound. Rest of tie sound.
752	Unpeeled tamarack	Well- house	41	.44	Splinter 1x3x18" from end to rail.	Sample sound. Slightly de- cayed in cen- ter of tie.

¹Lbs. per cu. ft.

(Continued)

Table 2.--Description of samples taken from Chicago and Northwestern test track (Continued)

Tie No.	Species	Proc- ess used in treat- ment	Num- ber of ties in treat- ment	Aver- age ab- sorp- tion	Portion taken as sample	Remarks
891	Peeled hemlock	Well- house	40	0.43	Splinter 1/2x3x18" split from end to rail.	Tie sound. Sample sound.
913	Peeled hemlock	Well- house	40	.43	Slab 1x4 ¹ / ₂ x 36"; en- tire top section of tie above ground.	Under side of sample decayed. Tie badly de- cayed under sample. Ends sound.
1617	Peeled hemlock	Well- house	41	.52	Splinter 1x2x18"; split from end to rail.	Sample sound. Tie sound.
1888	Unpeeled hemlock	Well- house	40	.56	Splinter 1x1x18"; split from end to rail.	Sample sound. Tie sound.

determinations must be made on the caustic solution and KNO_3 in order to correct for the chlorine which is usually present. Table 3 gives some idea of the accuracy of the method. In general, the agreement with the theoretical value is about as good as can be expected and is sufficiently accurate for the work in hand.

Table 3.--Accuracy of method of determining chlorine in treated wood

Amount of wood taken	Chlorine taken	ZnSO_4	Found	Found corrected for blank	Difference
<u>Gms.</u>	<u>Gms.</u>	<u>Gms.</u>	<u>Gms.</u>		
5.00	0.0000	0.0	0.0226		
5.00	.0725	.0	.0948	0.0722	0.0003
5.00	.0950	.0	.1174	.0948	.0002
5.00	.0000	.0	.0298		
5.00	.0337	.5	.0630	.0332	.0005
5.00	.0426	.5	.0716	.0418	.0008
5.00	.1021	.5	.1292	.0994	.0027

Results of Analyses

The results obtained are given in the following table:⁶

⁶Thanks are due to Mr. G. G. Town, Assistant Chemist, for about one-half of the analytical data given here.

Table 4.--Zinc and chlorine content of section of ties
treated with zinc chloride after 7 and 10
years' service

Tie No.	Zinc found by weight	Chlorine found by weight	Zinc chloride if all chlorine is in form of $ZnCl_2$	Excess zinc by weight	Zinc present which had been hydrolyzed
	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent
319					
Sec. I					
A	0.425	0.110	0.211	0.324	76.3
B	.422	.083	.160	.345	81.7
C	.437	.043	.083	.397	91.0
D	.167	.032	.062	.137	82.0
E	.341	.028	.054	.313	91.8
F	.424	.028	.054	.396	93.4
Sec. II					
A	.44	.08	.15	.37	84.1
B	.55	.16	.31	.40	72.8
C	.42	.05	.10	.37	88.1
D	.41	.028	.05	.36	87.9
E	.67	.067	.13	.61	91.1
F	.37	.089	.17	.29	78.4
200	.487	.074	.142	.419	86.0
313	.375	.070	.134	.311	83.0
486	.427	.070	.134	.363	85.0
527	.451	.060	.115	.396	87.8
657	.540	.094	.181	.453	83.9
752	.461	.094	.181	.374	81.2
891	.497	.106	.204	.399	80.3
913	.430	.068	.131	.367	78.4
1617	.417	.094	.181	.330	79.2
1888	.483	.160	.308	.335	69.4

Table 5.--Comparison in method of calculating the zinc chloride content of wood

Tie No.	Specific gravity of sample before analysis	Zinc chloride content if all the zinc were in form of zinc chloride	Zinc chloride content if all the chlorine were in form of zinc chloride
		<u>Lbs. per cu.ft.</u>	<u>Lbs. per cu.ft.</u>
319			
Sec. I			
A	0.535	0.295	0.071
B	.227	.125	.022
C	.212	.123	.222
D	.565	.123	.032
E	¹ .636	.281	.022
F	.258	.140	.008
Sec. II			
A	.580	.316	.074
B	.622	.445	.116
C	.395	.225	.042
D	.482	.366	.082
E	.500	.436	.080
F	.600	.320	.039
200	.310	.191	.027
313	.386	.191	.033
486	.553	.320	.047
527	.440	.256	.031
657	.521	.367	.057
752	.500	.302	.056
891	.352	.228	.045
913	.341	.190	.021
1617	.314	.169	.038
1888	.350	.223	.069

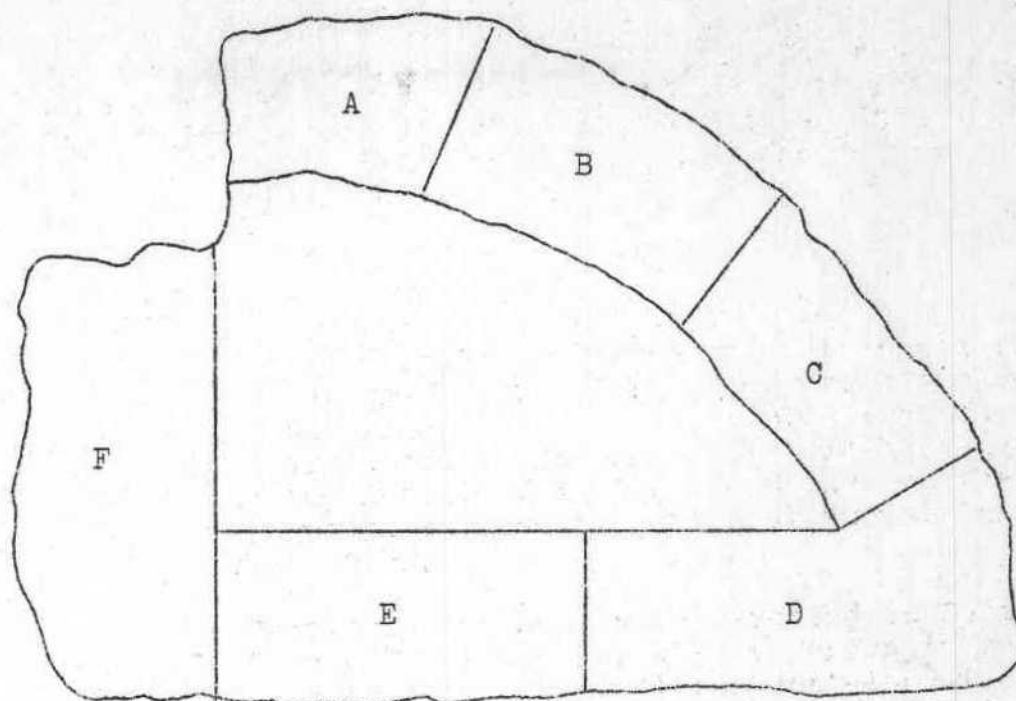
¹This section contained a large knot.

It is the usual practice in the wood preservation industry to refer to the amount of zinc in terms of pounds of dry zinc chloride per cubic foot. The results of the analyses have therefore been calculated to terms of pounds zinc chloride per cubic foot (a) when the amount of zinc found was taken as a basis, (b) when the amount of chlorine found was taken as a basis.

Discussion

It is very evident from the data shown that in actual practice the chlorine disappears from the wood much faster than the zinc as would be expected from the preceding theoretical discussion. Unfortunately, we have no way of calculating the amount of loss by leaching because we have no data upon which to base the original amount in the samples under consideration.

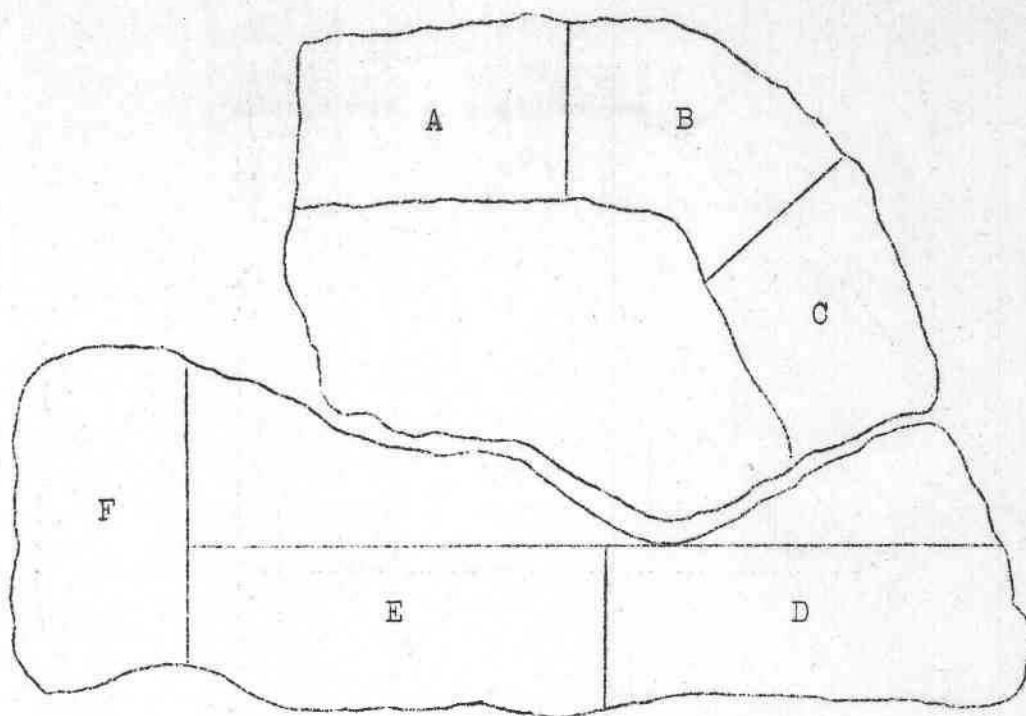
Particular attention is directed to Section 2, pieces D, E, and F, of tie No. 319, as shown in the diagrammatic sketch, Plate 1. These pieces contained the zinc equivalent of 0.366, 0.436, and 0.320 pound of zinc chloride per cubic foot and are badly decayed. It is usually considered that 0.3 pound of zinc chloride per cubic foot is the killing point of timber-destroying fungi. In these three pieces at least there is still left after 7 years' service enough zinc which, if it were in the form of zinc chloride, would prevent decay. If, however, we compare the amount of zinc chloride as calculated from the chlorine present, we find that, in general, the sound portions have the most chlorine and the pieces marked badly decayed but hard have not quite as much chlorine but contain more than the pieces marked badly decayed -- punky. In other words, there seems to be a general relation between the chlorine content and degree of decay. The 10 samples taken from the Janesville track simply confirm the finding of tie No. 319. The data available are not sufficient to draw any conclusions on the relative permanence of zinc chloride in ties treated by the Burnett and Wellhouse processes, nor can any conclusion be drawn as to the relative leaching from the two species used. Slightly less of the residual zinc was in hydrolyzed condition in the ties which were unpeeled before treatment than others of the same species and treatment but peeled before treatment. The difference is, however, small; the variations being less than the variations obtained from the different locations in the same tie. It may also be due to differences in absorption of zinc, the unpeeled ties taking up more than peeled ties of the same species under the same treatment.



Section 1, tie No. 319

Piece: No. :	Condition of sample analyzed	Content of zinc chloride equivalent to	
		Zinc	Chlorine
		<u>Lbs. per</u> <u>cu.ft.</u>	<u>Lbs. per</u> <u>cu.ft.</u>
A	: Apparently sound.....	0.295	0.071
B	: Do.....	.125	.022
C	: Badly decayed, punky.....	.123	.022
D	: Badly decayed but hard fruiting : bodies of fungus on bottom....	.123	.032
E	: Badly decayed but hard fruiting : bodies of fungus on bottom....	.281	.022
F	: Badly decayed, punky.....	.140	.008

Plate 1.--Cross-sectional outlines of tie No. 319, showing method of sampling, the condition of each piece, and the amount of zinc and chlorine found.



Section 2, tie No. 319

Piece: No. :	Condition of sample analyzed	Content of zinc chloride equivalent to	
		Zinc	Chlorine
		<u>Lbs. per</u> <u>cu.ft.</u>	<u>Lbs. per</u> <u>cu.ft.</u>
A :	Apparently sound.....	0.316	0.074
B :	Do.....	.445	.116
C :	Partly sound, rest punky.....	.225	.042
D :	Badly decayed, one-half punky, rest sound.....	.366	.082
E :	Badly decayed, one-half punky, rest sound.....	.436	.080
F :	Badly decayed but hard.....	.320	.039

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the work:

1. In the leaching of zinc chloride from wood the chlorine leaches faster than the zinc, part of which is left behind as an insoluble basic chloride. This would seem to indicate that the chlorine plays a very important part in the preservative and that if the zinc does not have its proper amount of acid radical it loses its preserving power. In other words, as long as the zinc remains soluble it is toxic but as soon as the insoluble basic chlorides are formed, the zinc so combined has but little or no toxic action.

2. The amount of each component leached can be calculated with fair accuracy from the diffusion constants of hydrochloric acid and zinc chloride and the amount of each component present in the mixture.

3. From the above it follows that the relative rate of leaching of any other salt from wood probably can be calculated if we know the amount injected and the diffusion constant of the salt.

4. The leaching of zinc chloride from wood in actual practice is similar to, if not identical with, the leaching of the same salt under laboratory conditions.

5. The presence of comparatively large amounts of zinc in treated material does not insure that the wood is protected against rot unless a sufficient amount of acid radical be also shown to be present.

6. The insoluble basic chlorides of zinc have little or no toxic value.