

TECHNICAL NOTES

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FOREST PRODUCTS LABORATORY

U. S. FOREST SERVICE

MADISON, WISCONSIN

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WHAT IS DRY ROT?

The term "dry rot", the Forest Products Laboratory finds, is applied by many persons to any decay which is found in wood in a comparatively dry situation. Thus loosely used the term actually includes all decay in wood, since wood kept sufficiently wet can not decay.

In the more limited sense in which pathologists use the term, "dry rot" applies only to the work of a certain house fungus called *Merulius lachrymans*. This fungus gains its distinction from the fact that it is frequently found growing in timbers without any apparent moisture supply; in reality it does not grow without moisture and is as powerless as any other fungus to infect thoroughly dry wood. Given moist wood in which to germinate, it is able to make its way a surprisingly long distance in dry timbers, drawing the water it needs from the moist wood through a conduit system of slender, minutely-porous strands.

Wood in the typical advanced stage of dry rot is shrunken, yellow to brown in color, and filled with radial and longitudinal shrinkage cracks, roughly forming cubes. In many instances these cracks are filled with a white felty mass, the interwoven strands of the fungus. The decayed wood is so brittle and friable that it can easily be crushed into powder.

The dry rot fungus is active in nearly every region of this country, in Canada, and in Europe. It is very destructive to factory and house timbers and to logs in storage. Coniferous or soft woods are more commonly infected by it than hardwoods.

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