

■ LUMBER 411

By Matt Pomeroy

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See the stamp, trust the quality



LUMBER GRADING seems to be an unwieldy, confusing topic... but it doesn't need to be! Read on for the first of two columns on this important topic.

LET'S TALK ABOUT lumber grading. It may not be the most exciting topic, but it's super important to you as a lumber retailer. Why? You need to know what you have in stock, and you need to be able to sell the correct stick of wood to your customers, depending on their end use. Ready? Let's go!

First, let's get some of the real boring, yet critical stuff out of the way! What is the American Softwood Public Standard 20 (PS-20) you wonder?

The PS 20 was implemented decades ago and brought standardization to the forefront for the softwood lumber manufacturing community. The standard was developed by the American Lumber Standard Committee (ALSC) through an industry consensus process in accordance with U.S. Department of Commerce procedures. Its purpose is to provide consistency to the lumber products brought to the U.S. marketplace for the consumer. PS-20 includes key elements such as common industry terms, standard lumber sizes, moisture content provisions, the National Grading Rule (NGR) and grade-marking requirements, and methods for assigning the all-important structural design values to lumber.

Also nestled under the umbrella of the standard is the National Grade Rule for Softwood Lumber (NGR), a rule which mills follow to manufacture and grade lumber to be used in structural applications, and grading agencies use to certify and check the mill's production. Lumber

graded and stamped under the NGR grades meet the requirements of local and national building codes for residential and commercial construction, if it's certified by an accredited agency under the ALSC program and properly stamped. These grades include the popular construction grades carried by most retailers such as No. 1, No. 2, and Select Structural, generally 2" to 4" in width. Each of these grades carry with them specific strength properties based on the species of the lumber. Did you know that the NGR provisions to grading such things as knot size limitations, the amount of wane permitted, and slope of grain are applied the same across the U.S. and Canada no matter what species of lumber?

Now, how does a retailer know their lumber is acceptable for construction use and building code acceptance? Just take a look at the grade stamp for the definitive answer. As required by ALSC with PS-20 guidance, a grade-stamp must contain five key items: the specie(s) of lumber, the moisture content (KD, dry, or green), the certified mill name or number, the ALSC-accredited agency logo that certifies the mill, and lastly, the lumber grade.

What about 1" boards? Glad you asked! So far, we have only talked about the structural grades of lumber and NGR. The PS-20 also provides the same backbone structure for grades that are applied to this material. However, each species across the U.S. has their own actual grade rules and names for boards. Southern pine, western species, and eastern white pine all have their own provisions as to wood characteristics permitted in their board grade rules. In many cases, the grade stamp information will be stamped on the end of the piece displaying the same five elements of the structural grade stamp discussed above. And since this lumber is generally for appearance-type applications such as furniture, wall and ceiling material, or siding, no strength values are assigned.

Here's a significant fact: there are approximately 900 mills currently operating under the supervision of ALSC-accredited grading agencies across the U.S. and Canada, thus accounting for roughly 98% of the softwood lumber consumed in the U.S.!

If you would like more information on the various aspects of lumber grading, email us at info@nelma.org.

— Matt Pomeroy is director of inspection services for Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association. Reach him at info@nelma.org.