

5 What opportunities do you see on the horizon for lumber?

In the world of softwood lumber, mass timber and CLT (cross-laminated timber) is growing. It's a slower growth than many had hoped, but as more buildings and urban environments continue to convert from steel framing to timber, the impact on the demand for softwood lumber could be significant.

Something we've been working on recently is finding new and better ways to use wood residuals from lumber mills and logging operations. Two possibilities on the horizon: wood fiber insulation, which is already in early production in Maine and which is huge from a sustainability perspective (insulating homes with cellulose based, local products rather than petroleum-based foams). If we can create a higher-value use for residuals, this benefits the lumber industry from one side to the other.

The second opportunity involves 3D printing. Here at the Advanced Structures & Composites Center, we are heavily involved in large-format 3D printing, to the extent that we're building a 90,000-sq. ft. addition to our current building just for this purpose. It will house research programs for bio-based 3D printing, which incorporates low-grade wood products and residuals (turned into wood flour) into the process. Ultimately, we'd like to transition the plastics used in printing from petroleum to bio-based as well. If we can eventually print homes, boats, and more, this creates a relief valve for the industry, plus an added value stream. Very exciting possibilities ahead!

- For more on the Advanced Structures & Composites Center at the University of Maine, please visit www.composites.umaine.edu.



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EASTERLING**

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