



Not just us hot and bothered!

This hot weather we have been experiencing lately has seen timber moving about in all sorts of interesting ways. As we live in such a dry climate these 30 plus degree days really suck the life out of timber products. Here's an example. Just prior to Christmas I was asked to look at a solid Blackbutt bench top we had made. For a few weeks it sat in our polish room before delivery. When it arrived on site it was wrapped and remained that way for some days before installation. A few days after installation it was noticed the top had rippled on the surface and there were signs of some splitting on one end. There were a number of contributing factors.

The top may have been a bit hungry for oil. We have reviewed our oiling procedures to ensure we get sufficient penetration on the denser species.

The weather was particularly hot and windy. The top was only a couple of meters from a north east facing glass sliding door which had no curtains, blinds or other form of shading. On the day I inspected the top the door was wide open with a good breeze blowing directly toward the top. This would have caused a rapid drying of the ends resulting in end splitting. This top was 60mm thick. As the top face dried to the new conditions the moisture deep in the core of the top had a long way to get out. The differential in moisture content between the surface and the core caused the rippling effect.

Why am I so confident the site conditions were the major cause of the problems? We had an off cut from this top stored in a pile of other off cuts at the back of our workshop and it had not suffered noticeably during the same period. Interestingly, the off cut had not been oiled either. As part of our quality control system we keep off cuts from most of our jobs for at least twelve months to see how they perform. We don't really look after them, just stack them on a pallet at the back of the shop. It's always useful with these problem jobs to have a control sample. So what to do with the problem top?

I asked the client to address the issue of the exposed windows and doors, to leave the door closed as much as possible, to operate the climate control systems to drop the heat in the room and to apply some oil to the top. About four weeks later I went back and was pleased to see the top had settled down. The ends looked fine and after I had given the whole surface a light sand, oil and buff it looked great. There was still some surface rippling but as I explained there

always will be some with a top such as this and I didn't want to cut down too deep and remove the oiled layer. Especially considering the weather is still so dry and I feel the top will spend some more time adjusting given it's thickness. The client was happy and I was relieved the problem was not as bad as it could have been. As I have already mentioned, we have reviewed some of our procedures and we will also look at the information we provide to clients to assist them in maintaining suitable conditions. In this instance the conditions didn't start out right but ended up OK. Some places would be better off not using timber at all.

Spontaneous combustion.

This warm summer caused me some more dramas recently. We oiled a deck with a mop and put the mop out on our trash pack afterwards. It was not in it but over the top. While we were at work, the mop head spontaneously combusted in the heat. It fell to the ground and started a grass fire. I live in a rural area so the "lawn" is mostly love grass at present. It burns well. Fortunately there was no wind so the fire slowly worked its way about instead of roaring off. It made its way towards the house but stopped at the garden edge. It moved east but was stopped by my gravel driveway, about 200mm from a parked car. It moved north, around the shed then turned east again and burnt just past my garden fence to a cleared area and stopped. Another two meters would have seen it in the bush. Who knows where it would have stopped. Fortunately the fire burnt itself out because no one was at home to stop it. We were incredibly lucky not to lose the house, shed, car, dogs etc. I can only say to all of you who use any turps based paints or finishes to please dispose of your rags, mops etc very carefully. You can burn them in a fire place, wash them out or hang them in a safe place to properly dry. It's easy enough to forget but in this hot weather that can be a deadly mistake. Happy woodworking!

Cheers

Shaun

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