Home-made Water Repellent for Wood

ECHO Inc.

Don Bernd wrote to ask what we would recommend to counter molding of "leather, books, accordion, and wood furniture" in extreme humidity in his part of Colombia. The U.S. Forest Service bulletin, "Wood Finishing: Water Repellents and Water-Repellent Preservatives," describes a method for treating wood that is exposed to weathering (but above ground). It is not clear from the publication what effect it would have on indoor wood exposed to extreme humidity, but it is worth a try. They treated experimental wood window sash and frames with the preservative whose formula is detailed below. The window units are in good condition after 20 years' exposure even though all the original paint has weathered away. Untreated painted window units decayed severely and actually fell off the test fence after only 6 years' exposure.

Extreme caution should be exercised in preparing the water repellent because the organic materials, especially the hot paraffin, are quite flammable. It is best to prepare it outside. Do not use a direct flame or heat near a flame such as the pilot light on a stove. To make one gallon of repellent, melt 1 oz. of paraffin wax in the top unit of a double boiler. Pour this into enough solvent to make a final volume of one gallon, stirring vigorously. The solvent should be at room temperature and can be either turpentine, mineral spirits or paint thinner. After these two are mixed, add 1.5 cups of boiled linseed oil. Exterior-grade varnish can be used in place of boiled linseed oil, but twice the volume (three cups) should be used. The preservative can be applied by brushing or dipping. The wood can be painted after it is dried if desired.

Even more protection can be obtained by including 1.75 cups of pentachlorophenol concentrate 10:1 (40%). The solution is then called a water-repellent preservative. Because this substance is poisonous it should probably be limited to outside use. Remember that is may be toxic to animals and plants. For (a little) additional information, request the free publication FPL-0124 from the Forest Products Laboratory, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Madison, WI 53705.

I don't know what to suggest for the accordion and leather! Any ideas?

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