

Tie Graders Give RTA Seminar An **A+**

This year marks the 23rd time that RTA has presented its annual Tie Grading seminar. But, just because the event has been around that long doesn't mean that it's the same as it was in 1986. In fact, it's even been enhanced and expanded since last year.

Retaining the best of the previous courses, the RTA Education Committee enhanced this year's course, held in the Roanoke Valley area of Virginia and hosted by Koppers Inc., with several new updates. First, to accommodate the changes, the course was

extended to include an additional half-day so that it now runs three full days. Then, several new video training and testing modules featuring "real-world" tie grading exercises were added into the already jam-packed agenda. Obviously, illustrating these new DVD modules isn't practical in photos, but the rest of the seminar certainly is. So, please take a moment to review this year's class photos and learn how students received instruction about allowable wood tie species and the ins-and-outs of tie grading. §

Day 1



On the first day students settle in with an overview of the railway engineering principles behind the standards for wood ties.



Then, Dr. Terry Conners of the University of Kentucky spends the afternoon session introducing the class to wood ID nomenclature and teaching students how to tell the difference between softwoods and hardwoods.



Following this, the course delves into more specifics, and the students learn how to tell the allowable hardwood species from those that don't make the grade.



Jim Watt of The Crosstie Connection participates in this discussion by introducing the take-home wood ID kits that each student uses throughout the course. These wood samples have been prepared in such a way as to allow quick access to the features that most easily delineate different species.



Thanks to Koppers Inc.'s Tim Ries and Gary Williams, it's not all work for the class. After the first day, attendees are treated to a ballgame with hamburgers and hot dogs. The group is recognized on the Salem Red Sox (Boston's A-level minor league team) scoreboard.



CSX's Lisa Benz and Leo Kreisel (foreground) visit with Williams and Koppers' John Heller (far right), who drove from Pittsburgh to lend a hand at the seminar.

Day 2



Back in the classroom the next day, students shift gears and focus on defects in ties. Watt and RTA Executive Director Gauntt run through the basics before students get a taste of what its like to be in a virtual grading station with new DVD modules added in 2009.



Then they do it for real at Koppers' Salem plant tie grading station.



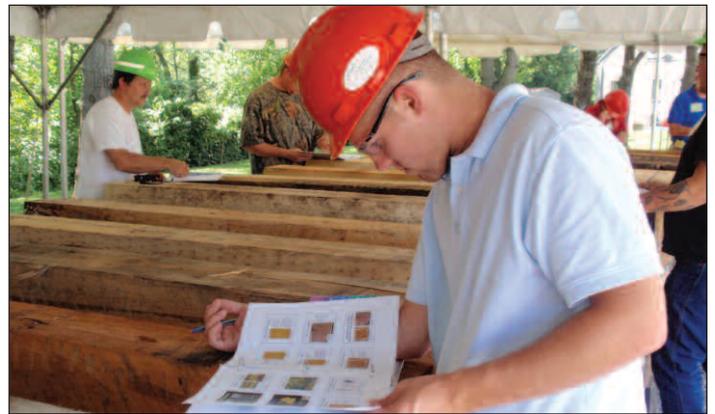
Students then convene to the area where full-sized ties are the focus of instruction. Dr. Jim Ringe, (left photo) also of the University of Kentucky, and Conners (right photo) point out key features to students.



Then it's time to put the classroom instruction to work.



Plant Manager Tim Ries, Education Committee member Steve Lish and Instructor Dr. Jeff Morrell of Oregon State University lend a hand as well.



And that concludes the second day of hard work for our 25 students.

Day 3



Back in the classroom the next day, students receive all of their materials for Day 3 instruction, while Dr. Morrell lectures on plant hygiene and wood preservation.



Conners provides a demonstration on how vacuum/pressure cycles are used to treat wood.



Watt reviews accelerated drying techniques for conditioning wood prior to treatment during this "Basics of Wood Preservation" module.



Then, students test themselves on what they have learned.



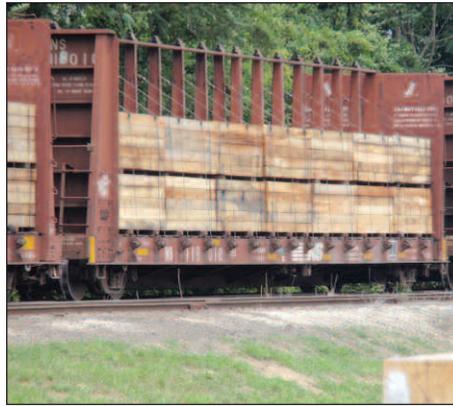
After the test, students' questions are answered during a hands-on review of the wood samples.



Later, it's back to the plant where Plant Manager Ries provides a safety briefing prior to leading attendees on a plant tour.



One of the stops is in the switch tie grading mill where students learn about grading longer ties that are destined for special track work.



Untreated ties come in by rail...and are graded...



...then incised and loaded onto trams...



...then placed in one of three 140-foot pressure vessels...



...and treated to perfection.



Inside the control room for the treating plant, Ries explains the computerized process for controlling the plant, which runs continuously.



No order is complete until it is loaded and heading toward track installation. Super clean operation!



Koppers' Steve Nipper runs the day shift at the bridge timber mill. Here, he explains the complex process of putting together a bridge order for Norfolk-Southern.



Then it's back to grading.



Committee Chairman Marshall Allen (left) supervises the second day of testing on full-sized ties...as do Heller, Conners and Williams in the photo at right.





Then it's time for the final test results. Watt has the call...



The winners are pictured with the instructors: E.C. Bounds of Stella-Jones/BPB Corp. and Ricky Vickers of Merichem Chemicals & Refinery Services.



All the students, instructors and RTA staff want to give the highest accolades and most sincere thanks to all the folks at the Koppers' Salem, Va., plant. The operation was perfectly set-up for the course, the sponsorship of the reception and baseball game/dinner was fantastic, and all of us feel like we received the royal treatment. Thanks to the RTA Education Committee and to RTA President Gary Williams and Plant Manager Tim Ries, along with all those at the plant, who made this event most successful and possible!

2009 RTA Tie Grading Seminar Attendees

Students

Glenn Stewart of Boartright Railroad Products Treatment Facility; Lisa Benz and Leo Kreisel of CSX Transportation; Steve Nipper, John Young, Jerry Holland, Ben Campbell, Adam Sisk, Ryan Hill, Juan Rivas, Marvin Perry, Maddox Bays, William Hamilton and Joe Dorris of Koppers Inc.; Rickey Vickers of Merichem Chemicals & Refinery Services LLC; Anita Blinn, Eddie Horton, Kris Hedding, Dave Johnston, Jeff Brooks, E.C. Bounds and Craig Menees of Stella-Jones/BPB Corp.; David Triplett and James Hall of Tangent Rail Products; Ryan Turman of Turman Lumber Co.; and Rick Bridges of Union Pacific Railroad.

Instructors & RTA Education Committee Members

Marshall Allen, Southern California Regional Rail Authority; Terry Conners and Jim Ringe of University of Kentucky; Jim Gauntt of the Railway Tie Association; Kris Hedding of Stella-Jones/BPB Corp.; Gary Williams and Steve Lish of Koppers Inc.; Jeff Morrell of Oregon State University; and Jimmy Watt of The Crosstie Connection.