DDSP Innovative in Meeting New Challenge

By Sherre Mitten-Belle, DDSP Public Affairs

Defense Distribution Depot Susquehanna, Pennsylvania (DDSP) successfully met the challenge of a new European Union (EU) requirement for shipping products to Europe.

The EU, concerned about the possible introduction of the pinewood nematode, a microscopic eelworm, now requires the treatment and marking of all new and used non-manufactured wood packing material (NMWP) being shipped into Europe. This includes pallets, crating, packing blocks, drums, cases, load boards, pallet collars, and skids.

For DDSP, the largest DLA distribution center in the world, this was a formidable task.

DDSP Packaging Specialist John Price, the NMWP project officer, planned and coordinated all aspects of the initiative by the effective date of October 1, 2001. To ensure DDSP became compliant, the undertaking required a vast amount of coordination, research and testing of methods. NMWP items and sources were to be identified, equipment procured, and personnel trained. Through the untiring initiatives and self-motivation of Price, all necessary procedures, processes, equipment, training, and plant layouts were arranged within a couple months.

"The European Union mandated NMWP program is a huge undertaking that must be taken seriously in order to protect our environment as well as ensure the unhindered movement of US Government material through our Allied countries in Europe," said DDSP Commander CAPT Chris McKelvey, SC, USN. "The potential impact to freedom of movement was significant, but it was overcome by the initiative and ingenuity of many fine people in the DDSP Team. I am very proud of the actions and accomplishments of the Team who have turned a potential roadblock into a smooth-running process."

Three treatment options are allowed: heat treatment (HT), fumigation or chemical pressure impregnation (CPI). Opting for heat treatment, the Defense Distribution Center (DDC) purchased a thermal chamber for DDSP. At 41-foot in length, 10-foot wide and high, it is one of a dozen in existence. Powered by an installed electric line, the air is heated with propane and circulated by fans under the interior aluminum flooring. Sensors monitor the floor and ceiling heat to maintain a cycle not exceeding 196 degrees Fahrenheit inside the insulated structure.

Price informed some 300 DDSP employees of the NMWF initiative, trained them to identify compliant wood markings, and taught them how to take corrective action. To increase efficiency, he established a satellite box shop to support processing wood shipments.

Several employees from DDSP Containerization and Fabrication Branch were tasked with determining differences between coniferous versus non-coniferous lumber, plus doing the work of heat treating, or building new boxes and crates with heat treated lumber. They respond to areas such as Containerization and Consolidation Point (CCP) and Hazardous Material that receive materials packed by vendors in NMWP crates. If not compliant, the crates are unpacked, treated, and repacked.

DDSP Woodworker Roger Tetzloff quickly learned to operate the thermal chamber, or oven. Tetzloff loads the oven by forklift; the thickest wood is held until the last load. Three sensor probes are placed into these finial pieces to monitor their temperature as they are heated, and to verify that 56 degrees Celsius is maintained for no less than 30 minutes. Treated wood is marked using a stamp after each "burn."

Striving to decrease cost, Price also focused the requirement that wood have a moisture content of less than 20%. This is important because in addition to the crates received by vendors, DDSP has a significant number of pallets, skids, containers and boxes already storing materiel destined for the EU, under cover, in warm dry warehouses. As an EU exemption, Price recommended the testing of NMWP to measure moisture content, since sufficient moisture needs to be present to support the pinewood nematode.

Scanning for acceptable levels of moisture content below 20% verifies the lumber is "Pest Free" and it can be marked accordingly. This process was presented to Pentagon officials on site October 16 and was approved for use Department of Defense (DoD) wide the following Monday.

On October 22, DDSP began shipping NMWP products to the EU using the moisture meter process using hand-held scanners equipped with electromagnetic waves to penetrate to a board depth of one inch.

In addition, DDSP Special Operations workers document and create an audit trail by recording the associated Transportation Control Number, National Stock Number, number of pieces, and other specifics of the shipment. It is anticipated the moisture meter process will reduce the manual correction of non-compliant shipments by 90%, resulting in substantial cost savings in processing and shipping wood products to the EU.

DDSP-M Woodworker Roger Tetzloff loads wood into the thermal chamber for heat treating.