Understanding Use Class 4 (UC4)
Preservative Treated Wood

Overview
Consumer and contract law require that any product offered for sale must be fit for its intended use and a wood product impregnated with preservative is no exception.

The minimum standards for the treatment of wood are set out in British Standard BS8417 (Preservation of Wood: Code of Practice). In this standard, the level of treatment is tailored to the application ‘Use Class’ of a wood product as defined in BS EN 335 (Durability of wood and wood-based products).

Use Class 4 is for end uses where wood is in contact with or very close to the ground and frequently wet.

Specification of correct treatment for Use Class 4
The table overleaf identifies common Use Class 4 components and specifies the minimum preservative penetration for both 15 and 30-year desired service life (DSL) categories in wood species that are classed as either permeable or resistant to treatment. Compliance with BS 8417 is achieved by meeting these requirements to an acceptable quality level (AQL). Please contact WPA for further details on other specialist UC4 applications such as heavy-duty railway sleepers and wood in fresh water.

A written specification should always include:

- **The component type and size** for example decking support joists 45mm x 95mm (and strength class if this is important to the application eg. C16 or C24);
- **The treatment Use Class** eg. Use Class 4 (UC4);
- **15 years** will be taken as the default service life unless 30 years is specified. You may also wish to specify the component species.

Preservative retention
Retentions are expressed in terms of the preservative manufacturer’s recommendation for the given use class, which for UC4 is R4 (for 15 years) and R4 x 1.5 (for 30 years). R4 is based on laboratory and field tests as specified in BS 8417 and EN 599-1. These R values are the minimum required retention in the zone requiring analysis (which in all cases mentioned here is the same as the penetration depth).

Penetration requirements can be difficult to achieve in resistant species such as spruce or where there is a heartwood penetration requirement (even for permeable species such as pine). Mechanical incising of the surface is now used widely to help achieve the desired penetration.
Table 1: BS8417 preservative treatment recommendations for common Use Class 4 components

<table>
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<th>Timber Components</th>
<th>Species Selection 1</th>
<th>15 year DSL Penetration Requirement 2</th>
<th>30 year DSL Penetration Requirement 2</th>
<th>Other considerations 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fence and deck posts, deck substructures (whether in direct soil contact or not)</td>
<td>PERMEABLE</td>
<td>All Pine species</td>
<td>Full sapwood (NP5)</td>
<td>Full sapwood plus minimum 6mm into exposed heartwood (NP6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil retaining walls, raised beds, bridge timbers (above water)</td>
<td>RESISTANT</td>
<td>Spruce, Larch, Douglas Fir</td>
<td>Minimum 6mm into sapwood (NP3)</td>
<td>12mm into sapwood plus minimum 6mm into exposed heartwood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES:
1. BS EN350 gives four classes to indicate the treatability of the sapwood and heartwood for a range of wood species. For UK preservative treatment purposes, however, only two classes are used: permeable (Treatability Class 1) and resistant (Treatability Classes 2, 3 and 4), in both cases based on the treatability of the sapwood.
2. Diagrams showing preservative penetration are for illustrative purposes only – actual penetration will vary by species and heartwood/sapwood ratios within each component treated.
3. Sampling requirements under the WPA Benchmark quality scheme: Check on retention and penetration levels initially once every 6 months by analysis of typically 13 treated samples. See WPA Benchmark scheme document for further details.

Specification & Installation Check List

Establish the Use Class of the timber you need, before ordering.

Tell your supplier in writing, that the wood must be treated to that particular Use Class to comply with BS 8417. Ask them to verify that the wood supplied meets your Use Class specification – on the delivery note and invoice or a treatment certificate.

When buying from stock always check to which Use Class the wood has been treated.

NEVER substitute wood that has been treated for an indoor application for use in an external application – failure is inevitable.

For wood in permanent ground or fresh water contact, or providing exterior structural support, **Use Class 4 levels of protection MUST be achieved. Anything less and service life, structural safety and customer satisfaction will be compromised.**

If using a cement-based mix to fix posts in the ground, ensure that water can drain away from the foot of the post. Do not make a ‘boot’ for a post out of concrete as this will keep the bottom of a post wet for long periods and increase the risk of decay.

When cross cutting, notching or boring treated timber products during installation, **ALWAYS** apply an end grain preservative treatment to freshly exposed areas – to maintain the integrity of the protection. NEVER put cut ends in the ground, even if end grain coated.