



House Cancer & How To Stop It



A more familiar identification would be wood rot or dry rot. I spent fifteen years renovating historic Charleston, SC homes. I held a general contractors license and worked with many sub-contractores and carpenters during that time.

My partner and I noticed one crucial mistake virtually every carpenter would make when they encountered wood rot during a repair. They ***did not*** address it.

They would remove and replace damaged wood, but some of the fungus would invariably remain.

That is Not Good

The fungus ***must*** be addressed. If it isn't, it will continue to devour your home. And eventually you will be making the same repair you just paid for again. Several months ago a neighbor had a friend repair some damaged fascia boards on his home. The carpenter removed the damaged wood, but he did not treat the surrounding area.

Over the years I've learned that no matter how much damaged wood you remove, some fungus will remain. You could tear the house down and get it all, but that's a little overkill.

No matter who you select to do your home repair, make sure they treat the new wood and the wood in the surrounding repair area before completing the job!

Tell your repair specialist that's what you want done ***before*** they start. You might be surprised how many carpenters don't consider it. This will save your home from future damage to that area. It's imperative! Be vigilant. Watch it being done and ask to see what preservative is being used. Better yet, recommend the preservative.

I had to do some repairs on my home recently. I had no wood preservative on hand, so I went to Home Depot. The sales people I asked had never heard of wood preservative. Can you imagine that? The only thing on the shelf was a can of Minwax® Wood Hardener.



The Minwax is OK, but it's **not** what you need to kill the fungus. So don't use that. The Minwax® Wood Hardener is designed to harden rotted wood fibers. I found marginal in my experiments. My approach is to remove all the damaged wood. In some cases that may not be possible.

For instance, there may be a slightly damaged underlying support, but there's not enough damage to warrant removable. Structurally it is still sound. The small rotted area would be removed, but there will remain some soft fibers. In that case I would use a wood hardener to consolidate the fibers. Today I would select a product like PC-Rot Terminator Wood Hardener by Protective Coating, an epoxy based solution. I've worked with epoxies in my lab. They are very tough. I would choose that over the Minwax.

So if you run into that issue in your repair, use a hardener, and then treat for residual fungus. The hardener is **not** a substitute for a fungus killer. And don't let anyone try to convince you that it is.

On a related note, we were called on many times to repair the huge damaged columns on historic homes. We would cut out the damaged areas and then use fiberglass to bond any remaining soft fibers. Then we treated for fungus (seen or unseen). Finally we would fashion a replacement section as close to the shape as the one removed as possible and attach it with nails or bolts, depending on the size. We would finish using automotive Bondo. When sanded and painted, you could never tell there was issue.

The EPA banned one of the best preservatives in the industry in 1985 - Penta. Since then there has been an effort to find a suitable alternative. So, what should you recommend your repair expert use to treat for fungus?

I used a product called WoodLife for many years. The original formulas were solvent based and very good. Today, some of the formulas available in local stores are water based. The product may still work as well as the original, but I cannot attest to that. I see that some Home Depot stores are now carrying it. Here is what they say. "Woodlife® Classic Clear Wood Preservative is a clear, fungicidal exterior wood preservative with water repellent designed for use on above ground applications."

Woodlife still produces solvent based products. One of the best is WoodLife 111. You can read about WoodLife products here:

<http://www.kop-coat.com/millwork.asp>



If you can find WoodLife 111 in quarts or gallons, this would be a good choice. There are more alternatives. One is Bora-Care.

This product does more than protect against decay fungus. "Bora-Care is a borate-based product that provides prevention and control of Termites, Carpenter Ants, Powderpost Beetles and Decay Fungi." You can find it at <http://www.domyownpestcontrol.com/boracare-p-100.html>.

You can get pest control using WoodLife 111 by adding an additive - Timbertreat® 15WT Insect Control. Both these products would be excellent, professional choices.

Of course, there are more alternatives available. You can search for them on the web. But the WoodLife or the Bora-Care will offer you some seriously good protection.

Remember, the fungus, even if you can't see it, must be killed. If your repair professional does not want to treat the old and new wood, I would say, "Thanks for your time" and bid them farewell. Your house is a huge investment. Protect it!

I want to make one final point. Carpenters might not want to use a preservative because it takes extra time and money. There is a drying period between the time the wood is treated and the application of primer, caulk, and paint. That may be 24 hours or longer. If a carpenter bids a totally finished repair, more trips are necessitated, so the cost of the repair escalates. They can make a more competitive bid if they don't treat. Make sure caulk and paint are **not** applied until the specified drying time of the preservative is reached.

You can ameliorate that issue by doing the caulking and painting yourself, or let your painter handle it if your carpenter's bid did not include that finishing step. Caulking! There's another white paper in itself. I may address that issue in my blog.

If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

The Fuquay-Varina Handyman - www.FVHandyman.com