

WOOD-PLASTIC COMPOSITES

ANATOLE A. KLYOSOV



WILEY-INTERSCIENCE

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CONTENTS

Preface	xxv
1. Foreword-Overview: Wood-Plastic Composites	1
WPC: Pricing Restrictions, 11	
WPC: Brands and Manufacturers, 15	
Flexural Strength, 15	
Flexural Modulus and Deflection, 17	
Deck Boards, 17	
Stair Treads, 18	
Thermal Expansion-Contraction, 20	
Shrinkage, 22	
Slip Resistance, 24	
Water Absorption, Swell, and Buckling, 26	
Microbial Degradation, 29	
Termite Resistance, 33	
Flammability, 35	
Oxidation and Crumbling, 36	
Photooxidation and Fading, 40	
Wood-Plastic Composites—Products, Trends, Market Size and Dynamics, and Unsolved (or Partially Solved) Problems, 42	
WPC Products, 42	
The Public View: Perception, 43	

- WPC Market Size and Dynamics, 44
- Competition on the WPC Market, 45
- Unsolved (or Only Partially Solved) R & D Problems, 48

References, 49

2. Composition of Wood–Plastic Composite Deck Boards: Thermoplastics 50

Introduction, 50

Polyethylene, 51

- Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE), 54

- Medium-Density Polyethylene (MDPE), 55

- High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE), 55

Polypropylene, 56

Polyvinyl Chloride, 58

Acrylonitrile–Butadiene–Styrene Copolymer (ABS), 61

Nylon 6 and Other Polyamides, 62

Conclusion, 64

Addendum: ASTM Tests Covering Definitions of Technical Terms and Their Contractions Used in Plastic Industry and Specifications of Plastics, 67

- ASTM D 883 “Standard Terminology Relating to Plastics”, 67

- ASTM D 1600 “Standard Terminology for Abbreviated Terms Relating to Plastics”, 68

- ASTM D 1784 “Standard Specifications for Rigid Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (PVC) Compounds and Chlorinated Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (CPVC) Compounds”, 68

- ASTM D 1972 “Standard Practice for Generic Marking of Plastic Products”, 69

- ASTM D 4066 “Standard Classification System for Nylon Injection and Extrusion Materials (PA)”, 69

- ASTM D 4101 “Standard Specification for Polypropylene Injection and Extrusion Materials”, 70

- ASTM D 4216 “Standard Specification for Rigid Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (PVC) and Related PVC and Chlorinated Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (CPVC) Building Products Compounds”, 70

- ASTM D 4396 “Standard Specification for Rigid Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (PVC) and Chlorinated Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (CPVC) Compounds for Plastic Pipe and Fittings Used in Nonpressure Applications”, 70

- ASTM D 4673 “Standard Classification System for Acrylonitrile–Butadiene–Styrene (ABS) Plastics and Alloys Molding and Extrusion Materials”, 70

- ASTM D 4976 “Standard Specification for Polyethylene Plastics Molding and Extrusion Materials”, 71

ASTM D 5203 “Standard Specification for Polyethylene Plastics Molding and Extrusion Materials from Recycled Postconsumer (HDPE) Sources”, 72

ASTM D 6263 “Standard Specification for Extruded Rods and Bars Made from Rigid Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (PVC) and Chlorinated Poly(Vinyl Chloride) (CPVC)”, 72

ASTM D 6779 “Standard Classification System for Polyamide Molding and Extrusion Materials (PA)”, 73

References, 73

3. Composition of Wood–Plastic Composites: Cellulose and Lignocellulose Fillers **75**

Introduction, 75

A Brief History of Cellulose Fillers in WPC in U.S. Patents, 78

Beginning of WPC: Thermosetting Materials, 79

Cellulose as a Reinforcing Ingredient in Thermoplastic Compositions, 80

Improving Mechanical and Other Properties of WPC, 83

Improving the Compatibility of the Filler with the Polymeric Matrix: Coupling Agents, 84

Plastics Beyond HDPE in Wood–Plastic Composite Materials, 87

Cellulose–Polyolefin Composite Pellets, 89

Foamed Wood–Plastic Composites Materials, 90

Biodegradable Wood–Plastic Composites, 91

General Properties of Lignocellulosic Fiber as Fillers, 92

Chemical Composition, 92

Detrimental Effects of Lignin, 95

Detrimental Effects of Hemicelluloses: Steam Explosion, 96

Aspect Ratio, 97

Density (Specific Gravity), 98

Particle Size, 99

Particle Shape, 99

Particle Size Distribution, 100

Particle Surface Area, 100

Moisture Content, the Ability to Absorb Water, 100

The Ability of Filler to Absorb Oil, 101

Flammability, 101

Effect on Mechanical Properties of the Composite Material, 101

Effect on Fading and Durability of Plastics and Composites, 103

Effect on Hot Melt Viscosity, 104

Effect on Mold Shrinkage, 105

Wood Fiber, 105

Wood Flour, 105
 Sawdust, 106
 Rice Hulls, 106
 VOC from Rice Hulls, 108

Long Natural Fiber, 110
 Papermaking Sludge, 111
 Biodac[®], 112
 VOC from Biodac[®], 112
 Rice Hulls and Biodac[®] as Antioxidants in WPC, 114
 References, 115

4. Composition of Wood–Plastic Composites: Mineral Fillers 123

Introduction, 123
 General Properties of Mineral Fillers, 125
 Chemical Composition, 125
 Aspect Ratio, 125
 Density (Specific Gravity), 125
 Particle Size, 126
 Particle Shape, 127
 Particle Size Distribution, 128
 Particle Surface Area, 128
 Moisture Content: The Ability to Absorb Water, 128
 The Ability to Absorb Oil, 129
 Flame Retardant Properties, 129
 Effect on Mechanical Properties of the Composite Material, 129
 Effect on Hot Melt Viscosity, 131
 Effect on Mold Shrinkage, 131
 Thermal Properties, 132
 Color: Optical Properties, 132
 Effect on Fading and Durability of Plastics and Composites, 132
 Health and Safety, 133

Fillers, 133
 Calcium Carbonate (CaCO_3), 133
 Talc, 137
 Biodac[®] (a Blend of Cellulose and Mineral Fillers), 141
 Silica (SiO_2), 145
 Kaolin Clay ($\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3 \cdot 2\text{SiO}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$), 146
 Mica, 146
 Wollastonite (CaSiO_3), 147
 Glass Fibers, 147

Fly Ash, 148	
Carbon Black, 154	
Nanofillers and Nanocomposites, 154	
Conclusions, 156	
References, 159	
5. Composition of Wood–Plastic Composites: Coupling Agents	161
Introduction, 161	
Why Such a Task?, 162	
A Brief Overview of the Chapter, 163	
Maleated Polyolefins (Polybond, Integrate, Fusabond, Epolene, Exxelcor, Orevac, Lotader, Scona, and Unnamed Series), 165	
Organosilanes (Dow Corning Z-6020, Momentive A-172 and Others), 171	
Metablen™ A3000 (Acrylic-Modified Polytetrafluoroethylene, PTFE), 173	
Other Coupling Agents, 174	
Effect of Coupling Agents on Mechanical Properties of Wood-Plastic Composites: Experimental Data, 174	
Mechanisms of Crosslinking, Coupling and/or Compatibilizing Effects, 180	
Spectroscopic Studies, 180	
Rheological Studies, 186	
Kinetic Studies, 188	
Other Considerations, 189	
Effect of Coupling Agents on WPC Properties: A Summary, 191	
Effect on Flexural and Tensile Modulus, 192	
Effect on Flexural and Tensile Strength, 193	
Effect on Water Absorption, 194	
Lubricants, Compatible and not Compatible with Coupling Agent, 194	
References, 199	
6. Density (Specific Gravity) of Wood-Plastic Composites and Its Effect on WPC Properties	202
Introduction, 202	
Effect of Density (Specific Gravity) of WPC, 205	
Effect on Flexural Strength and Modulus, 205	
Effect on Oxidation and Degradation, 205	
Effect on Flammability, Ignition, Flame Spread, 208	
Effect on Moisture Content and Water Absorption, 209	
Effect on Microbial Contamination/Degradation, 210	
The Effect on Shrinkage, 211	
The Effect on the Coefficient of Friction (The Slip Coefficient), 211	

- Density of Cross-Sectional Areas of Hollow Profiles of GeoDeck WPC Boards, 212
- Densities and Weight of Some Commercial Wood–Plastic Deck Boards, 215
- Determination of Density of Wood–Plastic Composites Using a Sink/Float Method, 216
- ASTM Tests Recommended for Determination of the Specific Gravity (Density), 218
 - ASTM D 6111 “Standard Test Method for Bulk Density and Specific Gravity of Plastic Lumber and Shapes by Displacement”, 218
 - ASTM D 792 “Standard Test Method for Density and Specific Gravity (Relative Density) of Plastics by Displacement”, 219
 - ASTM D 1505 “Standard Test Method for Density of Plastics by the Density-Gradient Technique”, 220
 - ASTM D 1622 “Standard Test Method for Apparent Density of Rigid Cellular Plastics”, 222
 - ASTM D 1895 “Standard Test Methods for Apparent Density, Bulk Factor, and Pourability of Plastic Materials”, 223
- References, 224

7. Flexural Strength (MOR) and Flexural Modulus (MOE) of Composite Materials and Profiles **225**

- Introduction, 225
 - Basic Definitions and Equations, 225
 - Moment of Inertia, 228
 - Bending Moment, 231
- ASTM Recommendations, 234
 - ASTM D 790, “Standard Test Methods for Flexural Properties of Unreinforced and Reinforced Plastics and Electrical Insulating Materials”, 234
 - ASTM D 6109, “Standard Test Methods for Flexural Properties of Unreinforced and Reinforced Plastic Lumbers”, 238
 - ASTM D 6272, “Standard Test Methods for Flexural Properties of Unreinforced and Reinforced Plastics and Electrical Insulating Materials by Four-Point Bending”, 241
- Flexural Strength of Composite Deck Boards, 244
 - English Units and SI Units, 244
 - Center Point Load, or Concentrated Load (3-pt Load), 244
 - Third-Point Load (4-pt. Load, or 1/3-Span Load), 247
 - Flexural Strength of Composite Deck Boards, 248
 - Flexural Strength of Materials Versus Profiles, 251
 - Flexural Strength for the Same Material but for Different Profiles, 252

- Comparison of Center-Point Load and Third-Point Load, 252
- Quarter-Point Load (4-pt Load, 1/4-Point Load), 253
- Uniformly Distributed Load, 255
- Effect of Temperature on Flexural Strength of Composite Materials, 256
- Effect of Commercial HDPE Materials on Flexural Strength of Composite Deck Boards, 257
- Effect of Density (Specific Gravity) of Composite Materials on Flexural Strength, 258
- Flexural Strength of Neat HDPE and Other Plastics, and Comparisons with that for WPCs, 258
- Effect of Plastic Content on Flexural Strength of Composite Materials, 259
- A Deck Board Used as a Stair Tread, 259
- Flexural Modulus of Composite Deck Boards, 264
 - Center-Point Load, or Concentrated Load (3-pt Load), 264
 - Third-Point Load (4-pt. Load, or 1/3-Span Load), 265
 - Flexural Modulus of Composite Deck Boards, 266
 - Flexural Modulus of Materials Versus Profiles, 267
 - Flexural Modulus for the Same Material but for Different Profiles: Solid and Hollow Deck Boards, 267
 - Comparison of Center-Point Load and Third-Point Load, 270
 - Quarter-Point Load (4-pt Load, 1/4-Point Load), 270
 - Uniformly Distributed Load, 272
 - Snow on a Deck, 272
 - Strength, 272
 - Deflection, 273
 - Effect of Temperature on Flexural Modulus of Composite Materials, 274
 - Effect of Commercial HDPE on Flexural Modulus of Composite Deck Boards, 275
 - Effect of Density (Specific Gravity) on Flexural Modulus, 276
 - Effect of Plastic Content on Flexural Modulus of Composite Materials, 276
- Flexural Modulus of Neat HDPE and Other Plastics and Comparisons with that for WPCs, 278
- A Deck Board Used as a Stair Tread: A Critical Role of Flexural Modulus, 280
- Deflection of Composite Materials: Case Studies, 281
 - Deflection and Bending Moment of a Soundwall Under Windloads, 281
 - Deflection of a Fence Board, 287
 - Deflection of WPC Joists, 288
 - Deflection of a Deck Under a Hot Tub, 289

Deflection of a Hollow Deck Board Filled with Hot Water, 290
 Deflection and Creep of Composite Deck Boards, 291

Guardrail Systems, 302

Composite (and PVC) Railing Systems for Which ICC-ES Reports were
 Issued Until November 2006, 307

Combined Flexural and Shear Strength: a “Shotgun” Test, 311
 Mathematical Modeling of WPCs and the Real World, 312

Verification of the Mathematical Model with Actual Conventional
 and Modified Composite Boards, 315

Weight, 315

Flexural Strength, 317

Flexural Modulus, 317

Impact Resistance, 317

References, 318

8. Compressive and Tensile Strength and Modulus of Composite Profiles **319**

Introduction, 319

Basic Definitions and Equations, 320

ASTM Recommendations, 320

ASTM D 638, “Standard Test Methods for Tensile Properties
 of Plastics”, 320

ASTM D 5083 “Test Methods for Tensile Properties of Reinforced
 Thermosetting Plastics Using Straight-Sided Specimens”, 323

ASTM D 695, “Standard Test Method for Compressive Properties of Rigid
 Plastics”, 324

ASTM D 6108, “Standard Test Methods for Compressive Properties of
 Unreinforced and Reinforced Plastic Lumbers”, 325

Tensile Strength of Composite Materials, 326

Compressive Strength of Composite Materials: Examples, 328

Tensile Modulus of Elasticity of Composite Materials, 329

Compressive Modulus of Composite Materials, 331

References, 332

9. Linear Shrinkage of Extruded Wood–Plastic Composites **333**

Introduction, 333

Origin of Shrinkage, 333

Size of Shrinkage, 336

Effect of Density (Specific Gravity) of WPC on Its Shrinkage, 337

Effect of Extrusion Regime on Shrinkage, 338

Annealing of Composite Boards, 338

Warranty Claims: Geodeck Composite Deckboards,	340
Examples of Composite Boards Shrinkage on a Deck,	345
References,	355
10. Temperature Driven Expansion–Contraction of Composite Deck Boards: Linear Coefficient of Thermal Expansion–Contraction	356
Introduction,	356
Linear Coefficient of Expansion–Contraction,	357
Some Reservations in Applicability of Coefficients of Expansion–Contraction,	358
ASTM Tests Recommended for Determination of the Linear Coefficient of Thermal Expansion–Contraction,	359
ASTM D 696 “Standard Test Method for Coefficient of Linear Thermal Expansion of Plastics Between -30°C and 30°C with a Vitreous Silica Dilatometer”,	359
ASTM D 6341 “Standard Test Method for Determination of the Linear Coefficient of Thermal Expansion of Plastic Lumber and Plastic Lumber Shapes Between -30 and 140°F (-34.4 and 60°C)”,	361
ASTM E 228 “Standard Test Method for Linear Thermal Expansion of Solid Materials with a Vitreous Silica Dilatometer”, (Withdrawn),	361
Linear Coefficient of Thermal Expansion–Contraction for Wood–Plastic Composites. Effect of Fillers and Coupling Agents,	362
References,	368
11. Slip Resistance and Coefficient of Friction of Composite Deck Boards	369
Introduction,	369
Definitions,	369
Explanations and Some Examples,	371
Slip Resistance of Plastics,	371
Slip Resistance of Wood Decks,	373
Slip Resistance of Wood–Plastic Composite Decks,	373
ASTM Tests Recommended for Determining Static Coefficient of Friction,	376
ASTM D 2047 “Standard Test Method for Static Coefficient of Friction of Polish-Coated Floor Surfaces as Measured by the James Machine”,	376
ASTM F 1679 “Standard Test Method for Using a Variable Incidence Tribometer (VIT)”,	376
ASTM D 2394 “Standard Method for Simulated Service Testing of Wood and Wood-Base Finish Flooring”,	377
Slip Resistance Using an Inclined-Plane Method,	378

Effect of Formulation of Composite Deck Boards on Slip Resistances: Slip Enhancers, 381
References, 382

12. Water Absorption by Composite Materials and Related Effects 383

Introduction, 383
 “Near-Surface” Versus “Into the Bulk” Distribution of Absorbed Water in Composite Materials, 384
 Effect of Mineral Fillers on Water Absorption, 385
 Swelling (Dimensional Instability), Pressure Development, and Buckling, 386
 Short- and Long-Term Water Absorption, 396
 ASTM Recommendations, 399

- ASTM D 570, “Standard Test Methods for Water Absorption of Plastics”, 399
- ASTM D 1037, “Standard Test Method for Evaluating Properties of Wood-Based Fiber and Particle Panel Materials”, 400
- ASTM D 2842 “Test Methods for Water Absorption of Rigid Cellular Plastics”, 402
- ASTM D 6662 “Standard Specification for Polyolefin-Based Plastic Lumber Decking Boards” 402
- ASTM D 7032 “Standard Specification for Establishing Performance Ratings for Wood–Plastic Composite Deck Boards and Guardrail Systems (Guards or Handrails)”, 402

Effect of Cellulose Content in Composite Materials on Water Absorption, 403
 Effect of Board Density (Specific Gravity) on Water Absorption, 403
 Moisture Content of Wood and Wood–Plastic Composites, 405
 Effect of Water Absorption on Flexural Strength and Modulus, 406
 Freeze–Thaw Resistance, 407

- Effect of Board Density on Freeze–Thaw Resistance — A Case Study, 407
- Effect of Board Density and Weathering on Freeze–Thaw Resistance— A Case Study, 408
- Effect of Multiple Freeze–Thaw Cycles, 409

Comparison of Water Absorption of Some Composite Deck Boards Available in the Market, 409
 References, 411

13. Microbial Degradation of Wood–Plastic Composite Materials and “Black Spots” on the Surface: Mold Resistance 412

Introduction, 412
 Microbial Effects on Wood–Plastic Composites, 412

- Mold and Spores, 413
- Moisture and Ventilation: Critical Moisture Content, 413
- Wood Decay Fungi, 414
- Biocides and “Mold Resistance”, 415
- Preservatives for Wood Lumber, 416
 - CCA, 416
 - ACQ, 417
 - PCP (The U.S. EPA Data), 417
 - Creosote (The U.S. EDA Data), 417
- Microorganisms Active in Degradation and Staining of Composite Materials, 418
 - Molds, 418
 - Black Mold, 424
 - Black Algae, 426
 - Case Study 1: Staining with a Microbial Pigment, 427
 - Case Study 2: Deck as a Mold Incubator, 428
 - Case Study 3: Black Mold due to Low Density of a Composite Material and High Moisture, 429
- Microbial Infestation of Wood–Plastic Composite Materials, 430
 - Requirements for Microbial Growth on Wood and Wood–Plastic Composites, 430
- Sensitivity and Resistance of Composite Materials to Microbial Degradation: Examples, 431
- ASTM Tests for Microbial Growth and Degradation of Wood–Plastic Composites, 434
 - ASTM D 1413 “Standard Test Method for Wood Preservatives by Laboratory Soil-Block Cultures”, 434
 - Examples: Wood, 436
 - Examples: Wood–Plastic Composites, 436
 - ASTM D 2017 “Standard Method of Accelerated Laboratory Test of Natural Decay Resistance of Woods” (Discontinued), 438
 - ASTM E 2180 “Standard Test Method for Determining the Activity of Incorporated Antimicrobial Agent(s) in Polymeric or Hydrophobic Materials”, 438
 - ASTM G 21 “Standard Practice for Determining Resistance of Synthetic Polymeric Materials to Fungi”, 439
- Effects of Formulation on Sensitivity and Resistance of Wood–Plastic Composites to Microbial Degradation, 440
- Biocides Used (Actually or Under Consideration) in Wood–Plastic Composites, 440

- Zinc Borate, (e.g., Borogard [U.S. Borax], Fiberguard [Royce International]), 440
- Barium Metaborate, Busan, 444
- Folpet, Fungitrol 11, Intercede TMP (carboximide), 444
- Chlorothalonil (tetrachloroisophthalonitrile), Nuocide 960, 449
- OBPA, Intercede ABF (10,10'-Oxybisphenoxyarsine), Vinizene BP 5-5, 449
- IPBC, Polyphase[®], Troy[®], Intercede IBF (2-iodo-2-propynyl-*n*-butylcarbamate, 3-iodo-2-propynyl-*n*-butylcarbamate), 451
- OIT, DCOIT, Octhilonone, Micro-Chek, Intercede OBF (2-*n*-Octyl-4-isothiazolin-3-one), 451
- Zinc Pyrithione, Zinc Omadine, Intercede ZNP, Zinc Derivative of Mercaptopyridine 1-oxide, 452
- Thiabendazole, Irgaguard F3000, 2-(4-Thiazolyl)-1*H*-benzimidazole, 4-(2-Benzimidazolyl)thiazole, Thiabendazole, MK-360, TBZ, 453
- Biocides: Accelerated Laboratory Data and the Real World, 453
- References, 459

14. Flammability and Fire Rating of Wood-Plastic Composites 461

- Introduction, 461
- Flammability of Wood, 462
- Ignition of Composite Materials, 463
- Flame Spread Indexes and Fire Rating of Composite Materials, 464
- Effect of Mineral Fillers on Flammability, 467
- Smoke and Toxic Gases, and Smoke Development Index, 467
- Flame Retardants for Plastics and Composite Materials, 468
- Flame Retardants in Plastics, 471
- Restrictions or Prohibitions of Some Brominated Flame Retardants, 471
- Chlorine-Containing Flame Retardants, 472
- ATH (Aluminum Trihydrate) and MDH (Magnesium Hydroxide), 473
- ATH Dehydration: A Quantitative Approach, 474
- Flame Retardants with Wood-Plastic Composites, 476
- Nanoparticles as Flame Retardants, 476
- ASTM Recommendations, 477
- ASTM D 635 "Standard Test Method for Rate of Burning and/or Extent and Time of Burning of Plastics in a Horizontal Position", 478
- ASTM D 1929 "Standard Test Method for Determining Ignition Temperature of Plastics", 478
- ASTM E 84, "Standard Test Method for Surface Burning Characteristics of Building Materials", 480
- ASTM E 1354 "Standard Test Method for Heat and Visible Smoke Release Rates for Materials and Products Using an Oxygen Consumption Calorimeter", 482

- E 162 “Standard Test Method for Surface Flammability of Materials Using a Radiant Heat Energy Source”, 483
- E 662 “Standard Test Method for Specific Optical Density of Smoke Generated by Solid Materials”, 484
- Fire Performance of Composite Decks and Deck Boards, 485
- References, 491
- 15. Thermo- and Photooxidative Degradation and Lifetime of Composite Building Materials 493**
- Introduction. Lifetime of Plastics and Plastic-based Composites: Examples, 493
- Thermooxidation, Photooxidation, Oxidative Degradation, and Product Crumbling and Failure, 496
- Factors Accelerating the Oxidative Degradation of Composites, 502
- Density (Specific Gravity) of the Composite, 503
 - Temperature, 508
 - The Physical and the Chemical Structure of the Polymer, 514
 - History of Plastic (Virgin, Recycled), 516
 - The Type and Amount of Cellulose Fiber, 516
 - The Type and Amount of Mineral Fillers, 517
 - The Presence of Stress, 517
 - The Presence of Metal Catalysts, 522
 - The Presence of Moisture, 524
 - Antioxidants and Their Amounts, 526
 - Solar Radiation (UV Light), 531
 - Amount of Added Regrinds, If Any, 540
- ASTM Recommendations, 541
- ASTM Tests for Oxidative Induction Time, 541
- ASTM D 3895 “Standard Test Method for Oxidative Induction Time of Polyolefins by Differential Scanning Calorimetry”, 541
 - ASTM D 5885 “Standard Test Method for Oxidative Induction Time of Polyolefin Geosynthetics by High-Pressure Differential Scanning Calorimetry”, 545
- ASTM Tests for Determination of Phenolic Antioxidants in Plastics, 546
- ASTM D 1996 “Standard Test Method for Determination of Phenolic Antioxidants and Erucamide Slip Additives in Low-Density Polyethylene Using Liquid Chromatography”, 547
 - ASTM D 5524 “Standard Test Method for Determination of Phenolic Antioxidants in High-Density Polyethylene Using Liquid Chromatography”, 548
 - ASTM D 5815 “Standard Test Method for Determination of Phenolic Antioxidants and Erucamide Slip Additives in Linear Low-Density Polyethylene Using Liquid Chromatography”, 548

- ASTM D 6042 “Standard Test Method for Determination of Phenolic Antioxidants and Erucamide Slip Additives in Polypropylene Homopolymer Formulations Using Liquid Chromatography”, 548
- ASTM D 6953 “Standard Test Method for Determination of Antioxidants and Erucamide Slip Additives in Polyethylene Using Liquid Chromatography”, 548
- ASTM D 3012 “Standard Test Method for Thermal-Oxidative Stability of Polypropylene Using a Specimen Rotator Within an Oven, 549
- ASTM D 5510 “Standard Practice for Heat Aging of Oxidatively Degradable Plastics”, 550

Surface Temperature of Composite Decking and Railing Systems, 550
 Life Span of Zero-Antioxidant GeoDeck Decks in Various Areas of the United States, 556

The OIT and Lifetime of Composite Deck Boards, 564

Durability (in Terms of Oxidative Degradation) of Wood-Plastic Composite Deck Boards Available in the Current Market, 565

Oxidative Degradation and Crumbling of GeoDeck Deck Boards: History of the Case and Correction of the Problem, 567

- Density, Porosity, and Mechanical Properties of GeoDeck before the Problem had Emerged, 567

- Emerging of the Problem, 569

- Density (Specific Gravity) of GeoDeck Boards in Pre-October 2003, 569
- Correction of the Crumbling Problem, 570

- Antioxidant Level, 570

- Density, 571

- The OIT Procedure: Proxy of Lifetime at Accelerated Oxidation, 571

- Accelerated (Artificial) Weathering, 572

- Air-Flow Oven, 573

Addendum: Test Method for Oxidative Induction Time of Filled Composite Materials by Differential Scanning Calorimetry, 574

Case Studies, 576

- GeoDeck Decks in Arizona, 576

- GeoDeck Decks in Massachusetts, 576

GeoDeck Voluntary Recall, 581

Problem GeoDeck Decks: Installation Time and Warranty Claims, 582

References, 584

16. Photooxidation and Fading of Composite Building Materials 585

Introduction, 585

- How Fading is Measured, 586

- Fading: Some Introductory Definitions, 588

Accelerated and Natural Weathering of Wood-Plastic Composite Materials and a Correlation (or a Lack of It) Between Them: The Acceleration Factor, 590	
Fading of Commercial Wood-Plastic Composite Materials, 596	
Fading of Composite Deck Boards Versus Their Crumbling Due to Oxidation, 600	
Factors Accelerating or Slowing Down Fading of Composites, 601	
Density (Specific Gravity) of the Composite, 601	
Temperature, 602	
UV Absorbers and Their Amounts, 602	
Pigments and Their Amounts, 603	
Antioxidants and Their Amounts, 605	
History of Plastics (Virgin, Recycled), 605	
Effect of Moisture in the Composite, 605	
The Type and Amount of Cellulose Fiber, 606	
Extruded Versus Injection-Molded Wood-Plastic Composite Materials, 606	
ASTM Recommendations, 607	
ASTM D 2565 “Standard Practice for Xenon-Arc Exposure of Plastics Intended for Outdoor Applications”, 607	
ASTM D 1435 “Standard Practice for Outdoor Weathering of Plastics”, 608	
ASTM D 4329 “Practice for Fluorescent UV Exposure of Plastics”, 608	
ASTM D 4364 “Practice for Performing Outdoor Accelerated Weathering Tests of Plastics Using Concentrated Sunlight”, 609	
ASTM D 4459 “Practice for Xenon-Arc Exposure of Plastics Intended for Indoor Applications”, 609	
ASTM D 5071 “Practice for Exposure of Photodegradable Plastics in a Xenon-Arc Apparatus”, 610	
ASTM D 5208 “Practice for Fluorescent Ultraviolet (UV) Exposure of Photodegradable Plastics”, 610	
ASTM D 5272 “Practice for Outdoor Exposure Testing of Photodegradable Plastics”, 611	
ASTM G 155 “Standard Practice for Operating Xenon-Arc Light Apparatus for Exposure of Nonmetallic Materials”, 611	
Addendum, 612	
References, 616	

17. Rheology and a Selection of Incoming Plastics for Composite Materials

617

Introduction: Rheology of Neat and Filled Plastics, Composite Materials, and Regrinds, 617	
--	--

Basic Definitions and Equations, 618

Shear Rate, Shear Stress, Shear Viscosity, Dynamic Viscosity, Apparent Viscosity, Limiting Viscosity, 618

Shear-Thinning Effect and the Power Law Equation, 620

Volumetric Flow Rate and a Pressure Gradient Along the Capillary, 623

Wall Slip Phenomenon, 625

The Rabinowitsch Correction, 626

ASTM Recommendations in the Area of Capillary Rheometry, 627

ASTM D 1238-04, "Standard Test Method for Melt Flow Rates of Thermoplastics by Extrusion Plastometer", 628

ASTM D 3835-02, "Standard Test Method for Determination of Properties of Polymeric Materials by Means of a Capillary Rheometer", 629

ASTM D 5422-03, "Standard Test Method for Measurement of Properties of Thermoplastic Materials by Screw-Extrusion Capillary Rheometer", 630

ASTM Recommendations in the Area of Rotational Rheometry, 630

ASTM D 4440-01, "Standard Test Method for Plastics: Dynamic Mechanical Properties Melt Rheology", 631

ASTM D 4065-01, "Standard Practice for Plastics: Dynamic Mechanical Properties: Determination and Report of Procedures", 632

Common Observations, 633

Neat Plastics, 633

Molecular Weight of Polyethylenes and Viscosity of Their Hot Melts, 633

Effect of Temperature on Viscosity, 633

The Power-Law Index of Some Neat Plastics, 635

The Power-Law Index and Molecular Weight Distribution, 636

Composite Materials, 636

Rheology of Filled Plastics and Wood Plastic Composites, 636

Filler Increases the Dynamic Viscosity, 637

Viscosity and the Power-Law Index of Wood-Plastic Composites Materials, 638

Steady Shear Viscosity and Dynamic Viscosity Data, 639

Capillary Rheometer and an Extruder: Are They in Agreement?, 643

Extrudate Swell, 643

Almost Uncharted Areas of Composite and Plastic Rheology, 644

Effect of Particle Size of Filler on Rheology of Wood-Plastic Composites, 644

Effect of Coupling Agents, Lubricants, and Polymer Processing Additives, 645

Varying Plastic Sources—Which to Choose for Composite Materials?, 647

Rheology of Regrinds of Wood-Plastic Composites, 651

Melt Fracture of Plastics and Their Composites and Reprints: Surface Tearing, 656

References, 670

Index

673

PREFACE

This book is by no means a comprehensive review of wood-plastic composites. Such an imaginary gigantic volume, or, rather, a set of volumes would be extremely boring, overloaded with little and unnecessary details, and would largely duplicate a great many books and papers on plastics, particularly in descriptions of compounders, extruders, downstream equipment, and other machinery.

My initial goal was to present a series of essays in the field of wood-plastic composites, which were supposed to bridge a gap between the laboratory-based research and testing and the real world, real decks, and real railing systems made of wood-plastic composite (WPC) materials. I was fortunate to spend a number of—I hope—productive years being a head of Research and Development division and Vice President, R&D of a company which first had a name Thermo Fibergen, then Kadant Composites, and then LDI Composites, manufacturing GeoDeck WPC decking and railing systems. We have gone both through the highs of our professional achievements, such as when our product was awarded the “Best Buy” status by a major U.S. magazine, and through the lows, when several years ago we voluntarily recalled many trackloads of suspect composite boards from distributors of our product. We have a thing or two to say about wood-plastic composites, about a road to success and a road to failure.

A manufacturing company like ours generates a wealth of knowledge, particularly when works along with many other experts in the field. We have all four great components in our work in order to absorb, digest, and generate knowledge: we research and develop WPC composites in the lab, we manufacture them, sell them, and install them in the real world. And, as a reward, we have a feedback from the field, on how our product performs. If an academic researcher, reading it, is jealous,

I can understand this. I myself was an academic researcher most of my life, including many good years at Harvard University.

So, having an academic experience in the fields of chemistry and biochemistry, and then having acquired an experience in engineering, strain and stress, material science, and, first and foremost, in keeping focus on priorities of the market, hence, on priorities of manufacturing, troubleshooting and problemsolving, and translation of these priorities back into research and development, I decided to share these experiences with a wider audience. A wider, compared with the audience I rather frequently meet at professional meetings, conferences, symposia in the area.

This book is focused on “substance,” that is, on wood-plastic composites and their properties, their behavior, rather than on means to manufacture them. I have soberly decided not to describe machinery, “hardware” in WPC manufacturing, because there are countless volumes in which the machinery is described in detail. Generally, as I see it, there is no principal difference between that machinery in the plastic industry and that of wood-plastic composites. Who thinks otherwise, seven feet under the keel and a favorable wind, and welcome to write a textbook or a monograph on the subject.

The choice of chapters for the book was very simple—all the seventeen topics were those which were of a great interest to colleagues of mine and myself when we were working on wood-plastic composites. All these topics seriously determine aesthetics, properties, performance, durability of wood-plastic composite products, and/or processability of the material.

By the time the book was submitted for publication, there was not a single volume on the market which would have the subject covered. The material is either scattered in multiple proceedings of WPC and related conferences and symposia, or published as separate papers in professional and semiprofessional editions. Hence, this might be the first try to collect the topics under a single cover, and I am fully responsible for it.

As a reader would notice, many features of wood-plastic composites are illustrated with GeoDeck decking and railing products. This is not a sales pitch but a reality because, as one knows, manufacturing companies very seldom publish data on their products, particularly in comparison with the competition. I have collected as many data published on commercial WPC as I could, including data provided by the manufacturer in their commercial literature and on their websites, and they are described in this book. We generated other data in our laboratory, using commercially available wood-plastic composite products. In many cases, when publication of data could have hurt the image of the manufacturer, I did not indicate the brand name and hid it under a number. I testify that the purpose of the book is not to show which material and product is better (there is no a universally better WPC product compared to competition), but to show a range of properties and explain why such a range exists.

The book would not appear without close cooperation with my co-workers who are too many to name them all. I would like to specially thank here Alan James, Dr. Tatyana Samoylova, David Leeman, Dr. Yiannis Monovoukas, Jonathan Painter, Steve Anderson, Mikiko Kubala, Matt Beachler, Brian Betz, Brent Gwatney, Lanny

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Last, but not least, I must thank my wife Gail, who had to tolerate my spending so many days, evenings and weekends, not to forget whole vacation time spans spent between as close to Boston as in Berkshires and as far away as in Tahiti and Bora-Bora, cloistered with computers, books, and papers in order to prepare this book.

ANATOLE A. KLYOSOV
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