

For Immediate Release



GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL CHOICE – AUSTRALIA
Australian Environmental Labelling Association Inc

**Buyers beware of imported
panel board products
and furniture**

Shocking results of a study commissioned by the Australian Environmental Labelling Association Inc (AELA) show that almost half of imported wood panel products tested failed to meet Australian standards with formaldehyde levels of the worst products over twice maximum allowable levels.

Formaldehyde has been classified as a Class 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). This chemical is also currently being reviewed by NICNAS, Australian Government body, for more stringent human exposure levels.

These products cover a wide range of applications including flat pack kitchens sold by prominent Australian retailers. For example, a kitchen cabinet door recorded the highest reading at 2.24 times the Australian standard for formaldehyde emissions.

Tests conducted on behalf of AELA at a specialist NATA accredited laboratory tested 16 imported products with 7 products failing outright. The results from the laboratory tests are shown below. The maximum limits allowable under Australian Standard are 1mg/l (Dessicator Test) for Medium Density Fibreboard and 1.5mg/l for Particleboard.

Type of Product	Product Type	Formaldehyde Levels using Australian Recognised Tests.	Australian Standard Maximum Limit	No. of times Australian Standard
Wall Cabinet (PB)	Whole Unit	2.95	1.5	1.97
16mm Laminate MDF	Sheets	1.99	1.0	1.99
16mm Laminate MDF	Sheets	2.08	1.0	2.08
16mm Laminate MDF	Sheets	1.74	1.0	1.74
16mm Laminate MDF	Sheets	1.07	1.0	1.07
Flatpack gloss door (MDF)	Door	2.24	1.0	2.24
16mm Whiteboard	Sheets	2.12	1.0	2.12

Note: PB = Particle Board, MDF = Medium Density Fibreboard

These results show levels that are close to twice the acceptable limits under Australian standards. The board products tested above come from Malaysia and China and directly compete with Australian made products, which meet Australian standards.

Mr Petar Johnson said "There are three important factors to consider here.

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There is the obvious health aspect with the potential incidences of sickness in the Australian population from standards that fail to meet Australian standards.

Importers of these products are achieving an unfair commercial advantage over local producers as they are buying low cost products from overseas that do not comply with Australian Standards whereas local producers who meet the standards are unfairly disadvantaged.

Australian consumers have the right to know what is in the products they are buying, yet for wood products like these it is impossible to tell whether they are toxic or not."

He further added "When markets do not consider the environmental loads of product they offer a hidden subsidy to manufacturers with environmental poor performers."

Many of these products also originate from countries with low levels of control and somewhat irreputable logging practices. It is quite likely that many imported products contain tropic rainforest timbers from native forests and logs which may have been harvested illegally or under limited supervision.

It is **fundamentally important** for Australian retailers and the domestic furniture industry to consider the environmental and human health implications of products they deliver to the market. Better environmental and social outcomes can be easily achieved by architects and specifiers using specifications which state at a minimum:

- 1. Board Products that falls within the Australian Standard formaldehyde limits for MDF and Particleboard.**
- 2. Board Products that contains fibre from plantation forests or recycled fibre only.**

Or for the best environmental outcomes:

- 3. Board Products that meets the specification of AELA 28 – Furniture and Fittings**

The Good Environmental Choice Label is Australia's only internationally recognized environmental life cycle declaration for consumer and building products.

More information on the relevant aspects of the Good Environmental Choice Label is contained in the voluntary Good Environmental Choice environmental declaration standard for furniture and fittings.

The voluntary environmental labelling standard is available for public download from <http://www.aela.org.au/StandardsRegister.htm>