FOR MORE INFORMATION:

University of Idaho Extension
Extension Educator
Mike Bauer 263-8511

May 5, 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

# USE OF TREATED LUMBER IN GARDEN BEDS

With raised beds being a popular and useful technique in north Idaho gardens, questions on the use of treated lumber for this purpose are plentiful.

Before 2004, landscape timbers were usually treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA) or acid copper chromate (ACC). After January 2004, the wood preserving industry voluntarily phased out the use of wood preservatives that contain arsenic. That transition has affected nearly all residential uses of CCA treated wood. If you have purchased treated wood after January, 2004, you probably do not have arsenates in the treated wood. Many timbers purchased after January 2004 do not contain arsenic. Some labeled as "heavy duty" timbers may still contain CCA or other materials – your supplier will know for sure.

**Does arsenic or copper leach into garden soils?**

A study of soil in raised garden beds found no increase in arsenic in soil 1-12 inches away from CCA-treated wood. In general, most metals taken up by plants remain in the roots, and most of these are in the surface skin and can be removed by peeling. In one study, the highest concentrations of arsenic occur 0-1 inches from treated wood, with a steady decline in concentration at greater distances.

If you have purchased CCA-treated timbers and they have direct garden soil contact, they may be leaching small amounts of arsenic into the soil very close to the timbers. To be absolutely safe, it may be a good idea to carefully remove soil near the timbers, line the exposed side with heavy mil black plastic film and then replace the soil. Plants grown at least 15 inches away from exposed CCA-treated timbers can be regarded as safe.

Alternatives to treated lumber include timbers made of recycled plastic or plastic/wood composite or masonry can provide the ideal material for raised beds.

Resources:

Garden Use of Treated Lumber. Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, Agricultural Reseqrch and Cooperative Extension, 2002. Referenced April 17, 2009 at: http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/uc173.pdf

Gegner, L. Organic Alternatives to Treated Lumber. Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas, 2002. Referenced April 17, 2009 at: http://ww2.attra.ncat.org/index.php/PDF/lumber.pdf

*Michael Bauer is the Extension Horticulture/Small Farms Educator for the University of Idaho Extension in Bonner County.*