

Wood to the Rescue

The versatility of using wood planks for industrial scaffolding applications

By Colby Hubler

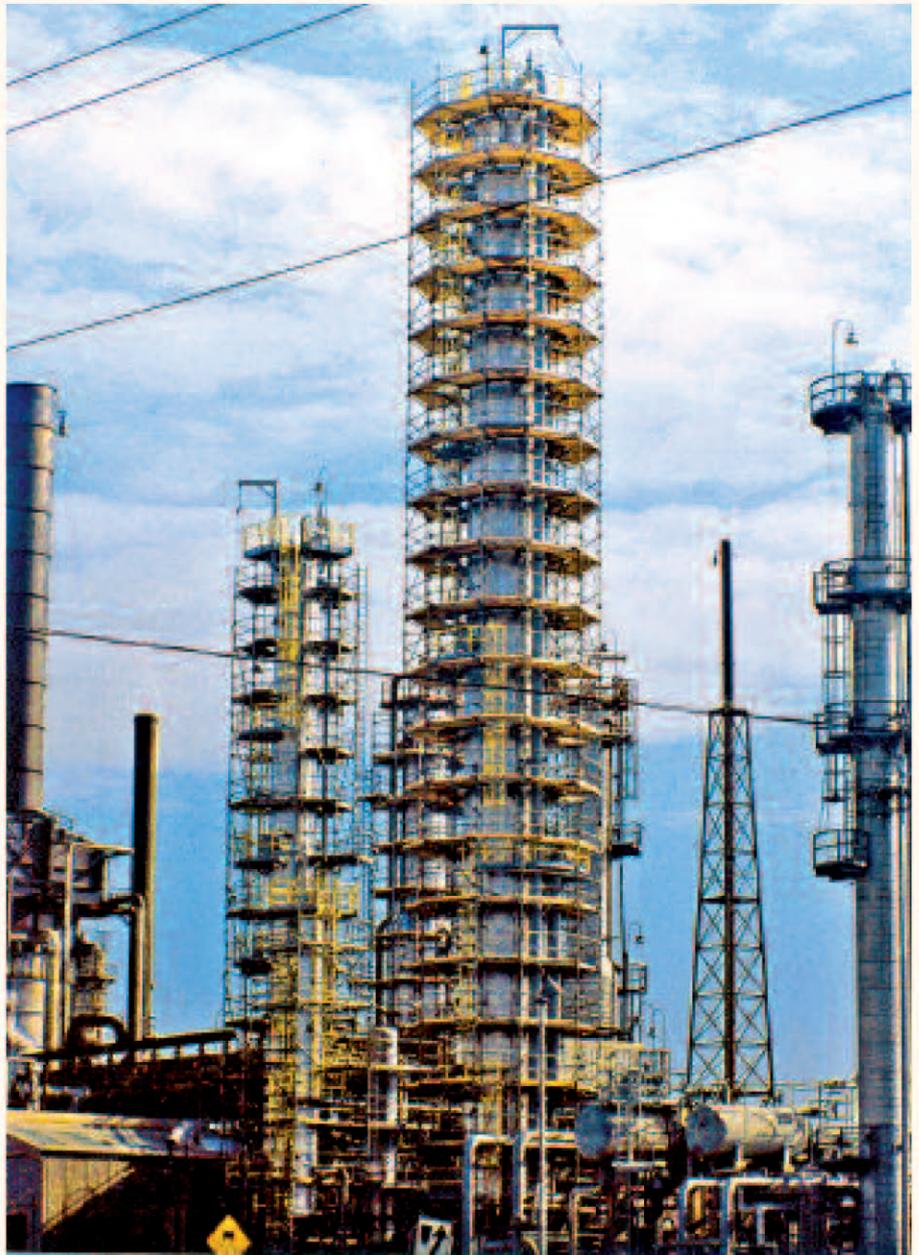
Industrial scaffolding applications produce some of the harshest conditions for scaffold planks. Chemical spills, sandblasting and heat are but a small variety of the extremes. Considerable stresses wreak havoc on equipment and personnel.

For scaffold plank, this is the ultimate test – starting from scaffold erection, insulation services, coating services, non-stop personnel use for months at a time and finally dismantle. One type of plank continues to work its way to the top of the system due to its resiliency, workability and overall cost: wood. For decades, wood scaffold plank has been the choice for industrial scaffold companies.

Versatility

One of the largest scaffold companies in the nation, the Brock Group, headquartered in Houston, uses wood scaffold planks for their industrial scaffold craft. “Wood scaffold planks will always be utilized in industrial applications due to the complexity of design and application,” said Randy Moody, the Brock Group’s vice president material control. “Wood planks offer greater utilization, as they can be used safely with all of your owned scaffold systems.”

Not every stage is set at a 90 degree corner. Wood planks can be set at 45 degrees or other angles to work around odd-shaped jobs. The overlapping of wood plank when wrapping a pipe stack or tank, for example, keeps the scaffold system tight to the project and ultimately uses less material.



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An example of solid sawn wood scaffold plank embossing.

Wood planks can be cut back or cut to length to fit the specific application. When solid sawn wood plank is graded, the characteristics for that grade are required to be consistent for the entire length. In the field, if a plank has a

damaged section, it can be cut back to useable lengths without disrupting the physical grade characteristics. This is a fortunate trait since shorter lengths are a staple for industrial applications. Additionally, proper installation time is

of the essence. Waiting for specific plank lengths from a manufacturer may not work. In a bind, wood scaffold plank may be cut to the lengths necessary for the application. During a shut-down, clients cannot generate revenue. However, using products that are workable onsite enables the project to keep moving forward. Wood does just that.

Ease of Inspection

Damage and overuse of wood planks are easily identifiable and, most of the time, easily repaired. Unlike other products which may hide internal damage or contain permanent damage, wood planks can have damaged portions removed and the plank cut back to a useable length, when inspected by a competent or qualified person.

Identification

With the possibility of many companies working on the same industrial site and a variety of manufacturer products, proper identification is the key to tracking inventory. Fortunately for wood planks, a grade stamp is required by ANSI A10.8-2001 5.2.4 which states, "all solid sawn wood planks shall be rated as 'scaffold plank' grade and shall be certified by or bear the grade stamp of a grading agency approved by the American Lumber Standards Committee." This stamp can be traced back to the manufacturer verifying that it is an approved scaffold plank grading mill by the American Lumber Standards Committee. Planks that do not contain a mill stamp or manufacturer's name should be questioned for authenticity and safety.

Most wood plank manufacturers mark the edges of the plank with ink or ink embossed information. This may contain the words "Scaffold Plank" or "OSHA" to signify that the manufacturer meets or exceeds the OSHA standard requirements, product name, owning company's name and date. From an industrial plant's perspective, one of the most important embossing items is the date.



Stacks of wood scaffold plank.

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“The date stamping is currently used as a tool by many industrial facilities to inspect and rotate plank stock at their site,” said Moody. With wood planks being exposed to harsh conditions, rotation of the stock by date and frequent inspection helps prevent overuse and keeps the jobsite safe. Since most industrial scaffold plank applications are walking surfaces, plants also look for various traction surfaces to enhance personnel footing, compliance and safety.

Cost

From a cost standpoint, it is no secret that solid wood scaffold planks lead the pack in value. Their cost is lower than other manufactured planks and their workability provides a higher value. Should damage occur, there may be no need to throw them out, once inspected by a competent or qualified person. As mentioned above, some damage may be removed or cut back from the plank and set to a useable length. Using wood scaffold planks on a project will positively affect profitability.

Beyond the Norm

Some industrial applications may require a type of interior or exterior fire retardant treatment. These treatments produce an effective and economical material for reducing the effects of fire. For example, wood scaffold planks treated with an exterior fire retardant material and used in areas exposed to weather are able to reduce flame spread and smoke development for applications directly exposed to heat and, potentially, fire. Dense Industrial 65 SYP has an auto ignition temperature of 425 to 475 degrees. We don't see too many personnel working in such a temperate environment. However, in extreme cases where fire and heat are concerns, the versatility of wood accepts treatment allowing that extra step in safety.

Industrial jobs are not the only area in which wood scaffold planks excel. The benefits of using wood scaffold planks mentioned above apply to commercial applications as well. When using product that meets or exceeds the OSHA and ANSI requirements for wood scaffold plank, users will find that the density of the wood, the slope of grain and deflection prove a strength value second to none.

If your organization is looking to purchase wood scaffold planks for your next turnaround, turn your focus to the Scaffold Industry Association. There are fellow wood scaffold plank manufacturing members in your midst. It is suggested that scaffold users look to the SIA Scaffold Plank Purchasing Guidelines and follow the recommen-

dations and best practice examples to make sure they are purchasing compliant solid sawn wood scaffold planks from a legitimate manufacturer.

The next time you or your labor force is on an industrial job, take a look at what is under you and know that you are well supported. Wood scaffold planks have been the solid choice in industrial applications for many years and, due to their versatility, we can expect to see their use for many years to come. ■

Colby Hubler is the SIA Plank & Platform Council chairman and works for Mill Direct. He can be reached at colby@milldirectlumber.com.

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