

G-P takes a position on chlorine-free pulps



A.D. "PETE" CORRELL is president and chief operating officer of Georgia-Pacific Corp. The following is taken from a letter Mr. Correll sent to G-P's pulp customers.

The issues of dioxin, chlorine, chlorinated organics, and adsorbable organic halogens (AOX) have been topics of great debate in our industry for several years. As the largest supplier of market pulp in the world, Georgia-Pacific Corp. has devoted tremendous time and resources toward understanding these issues. We have now reached decisions that will be the basis for our business strategy in the coming years.

First, let me assure you we did not make these decisions lightly. The stakes for Georgia-Pacific and for you are enormous. We must continue our corporate heritage of environmental stewardship balanced against a commitment to you, our customers, to provide a cost-effective raw material so that you can compete in the increasingly competitive world paper markets. We have used the best scientific expertise available, much from research that we have supported, to assist us in reaching our decision. We will continue to support research and monitor all scientific and technical findings in this area.

NO HEALTH RISK FOUND. The fact is that Georgia-Pacific can find no scientific evidence to indicate measurable environmental or health impacts linked to the release of properly treated mill effluents from our pulp and paper mills that use chlorine in the United States. Despite many claims by environmental groups to the contrary, the scientific evidence indicates that our level of use of chlorine is environmentally safe.

When it became known that minute levels of dioxin were formed as an unwanted by-product of the chlorine bleaching process, Georgia-Pacific moved aggressively to understand the issue. Any dioxin formation at our mills was incredibly small and near or below conventional detection limits. Nonetheless, we invested more than \$100 million to reduce those minute amounts by more than 85% to levels that are beyond any human health risk, even using the most conservative assumptions. Our operating strategy has been to increase use of chlorine dioxide, and decrease amounts of elemental chlorine.

CHLORINE DIOXIDE INVESTMENT. We have reached a point now where we must decide whether to continue to invest in increased chlorine dioxide substitution with a long-term goal of virtual elimination of elemental chlorine from our bleach plants, or to abandon our assets and those plans in a quest for bleaching processes that utilize no chlorine ions. The cost of seeking nonchlorine compounds for the bleaching process would be enormous without any corresponding health benefit offset and would force Georgia-Pacific from our position as the largest and most competitive market pulp supplier. We find no scientific rationale for such an ill-conceived move and have rejected the idea. We will continue to invest in chlorine dioxide substitution at our bleach plants.

The key question is, "What does this mean to you, our valued pulp customer?" First, it means that Georgia-Pacific will continue its commitment to be the environmentally sensitive, low-cost producer of the highest-quality market pulp to the industry. We are convinced that our business strategy is sound and are continuing to fund our market pulp business in spite of these very difficult times. Second, it means you can plan your supply needs around that commitment. If you feel you must have "chlorine-free" bleached pulps which cannot have used even chlorine dioxide and your markets will accept the differences in quality and performance, then G-P can no longer be a supply source.

Georgia-Pacific has an impressive array of world-class market pulp mills located in low-cost fiber baskets. Our softwood mills at Brunswick [Ga.] and Leaf River [Ill.] are among the world's best. Our hardwood mills at Ashdown [Ark.], Woodland [Maine], Port Hudson [La.], Leaf River, and Palatka [Fla.] produce cost-effective pulps that can reduce your pulp cost and improve your quality. At all of these mills our commitment to serve you and protect the environment is enduring. We are convinced these strategic decisions will serve all of us well in the coming years.