

Tie Grading Seminar Covers Everything From Species To Operations

By Barbara Stacey

The 2022 Tie Grading Seminar at the Stella-Jones plant in Bangor Wis., was exceptional. Attendees were able to learn about species, defects, treating, drying, fungus, insects, disease, railroad engineering, plant operations and more.

With multiple opportunities for hands-on species and defects identification with small blocks and full-sized ties as well as a tour of the Stella-Jones Bangor plant, attendees came away with job-enhancing information and skills. New this year was a

deeper dive into treated tie grading that the attendees found very useful. ■

Thank you to Brewco, Stella-Jones and Koppers for the sponsorships that made the 2022 Tie Grading Seminar excellent!

DAY 1

After a safety briefing, day one began with a short history of the railroads and why ties are essential from an engineering perspective. Then, the group dove into defects, a tie grading quiz and enjoyed an evening reception sponsored by Stella-Jones.



The kick-off reception was sponsored by Brewco. Mike Goldston gave an overview of the company and offered swag to the attendees.



Education Committee Chair Marshall Allen begins with a brief history of railroads and a presentation about engineering and the importance of crossies.



Brad Crawford of Stella-Jones continues with an introduction to why defects matter and moves into...



...a tag-team presentation on specific defects by Jordan Estes, also of Stella-Jones.



After lunch, RTA Executive Director Dr. Nate Irby explains a bit more about defects before the grading station video test.



And the winner of the tie grading station video and a \$100 Amazon gift card is Dylan Pahssen of Stella-Jones!



It's on to species ID with Dr. Terry Conners, professor emeritus of University of Kentucky.



Students listen and take notes on how to identify red oak, white oak, hickory, mixed hardwoods, softwoods and excludable species.



Dustin Roseberry of Stella-Jones shows off his red oak bubbles. No tyloses in red oak means that air passes through the wood to the bubble solution.



Brad Crawford explains species as Christian Porter and Nate Kendrick look on.



Tony Kessler of Koppers looks at a big block to determine its species.



After winning a five-way tiebreaker by identifying the exact species, Mike Collins of Stella-Jones is our Big Block Test winner!



Robert Johnson, left, of BNSF and Mike Collins of Stella-Jones chat at the evening reception.



Jim Raines representing Stella-Jones at the reception gives a brief overview of the company.

DAY 2 Day two started off with an overview of some defects that happen after the tie is cut. The students gained insight into why their work matters to the end user in the "Tree to Track" presentation. Treating the ties came next with an overview of how the process happens at a plant. Then it was off to the plant after lunch with a tour and a practice round of grading 25 full-sized ties. A special thank you is due to Koppers for sponsoring the evening reception at the end of Day 2.



Dr. Jim Ringe, professor emeritus at the University of Kentucky, talks about insects, fungi and air drying. He then segues into ties from tree to track tag-team with...



...Dr. Nate Irby who goes in depth about the processes used to treat railroad ties.



Dr. Conners gives his signature small-tie treating demonstration to the group showing how pressure moves the preservative into the wood.



Josh Kmoch offers an overview of plant operations with an aerial video of a Koppers plant.



The group receives a warm welcome from the good folks at the Stella-Jones Bangor plant.



Plant manager and 2012 Tie Grading Seminar Grading Derby winner Ryan Peterson explains plant operations to Billy Sullivan, Joe Brumfield and Tony Kessler, all of Koppers.



Ties from the grader's perspective. Within a few seconds the grader decides species and defects and sorts the ties accordingly. ▶



A tour group walks past treated ties ready for shipment.



Ryan Peterson explains the technical aspects of treating as 48-year employee Dan Davis looks on.



Juan Carlos Covarrubias of Genesee and Wyoming and James Edwards of CR Quality Services scrutinize a tie.



Dr. Nate Irby explains species and defects as Tyler Nelson of Koppers and Andrej Jovanoski, Daniel Loureiro and Garrett King of Canadian National look on.



Josh Kmoch gives a short summary of Koppers' vision to the guests at the reception.

DAY 3

According to tradition, the instructors wear Hawaiian shirts for the final day of the seminar. A brief recap in the morning prepared the attendees for the final Tie Grading Derby at the Stella-Jones plant. This year, interested attendees were able to take a deeper dive into treated tie defects and species with the instructors after lunch.



Dr. Nate Irby gives the safety briefing and overview of the day before students go back to the plant.



Yin Gao of MxV scrutinizes a tie.



Christian Porter looks for species and defects before writing his guess on the test sheet.



Aspen Alford of Koppers thinks twice before writing the answer.



The instructors pause to pose for a Hawaiian shirt portrait.



Yin Gao is the 2022 Tie Grading Derby winner!



The Derby winner gets to wear a Hawaiian shirt as an honorary instructor.



During the treated tie deep dive, Joshua Brass of CSX listens and looks for defects and species.



Dr. Nate Irby explains how to identify species and defects in treated ties as Brad Crawford and Donny Joe Hanback of Stella-Jones look on.



The group gathers around to look at an anomaly on a treated tie.



Pictured here are nine railroaders who attended the 2022 Tie Grading Seminar.



2022 Tie Grading Seminar Attendees

Jason McMaster and Robert Johnson of BNSF Railway; Andrej Jovanoski, Garrett King and Daniel Loureiro of Canandian National Railway; James Edwards, Jamey Hilse, Michael Hilse and Johnathan Knight of CR Quality Services Inc.; Joshua Brass and Justin Childers of CSX Transportation; Juan Carlos Covarrubias of Genesee & Wyoming; Dallas Durrow of Gross & Janes Co.; Joseph Brumfeld, Alan Davis, Zachary Hull, Tony Kessler, Tyler Nelson, Aspen Alford, Kyle Polson, Jeff Smith and Billy Sullivan of Koppers; Yin Gao of MxV Rail; Jeremiah Ackerson, Dustin Roseberry, Morgan Troquille, Donny Joe Hanback, Cody Hora, Nate Kendrick, Dylan Pahssen, Christian Porter, Matt Soucek, Hunter Dickinson, Matthew Powell, Barry Korth and Michael Collins of Stella Jones; Benedict Okine of Union Pacific Railroad.

Faculty & Special Guests

Terry Conners and Jim Ringe, UK-Emeritus; Brad Crawford and Jordan Estes of Stella Jones; Mike Goldston of Brewco; Nate Irby and Barbara Stacey of Railway Tie Association; Josh Kmoch of Koppers.

HARDWOOD PROCUREMENT TRENDS EASTERN HALF U.S. AUGUST 2022

The gauges below represent "snapshot in time" opinions of in-the-field wood tie buyers who procure untreated crossties from sawmills in their regions. RTA does not warrant nor accept responsibility for the accuracy of the data generated. See more on rtastats.org.

