

25th March 2008

US Environmental Authorities approve registration of copper as antimicrobial agent

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has approved registration of copper as an antimicrobial agent able to reduce specific harmful bacteria linked to potentially deadly microbial infections.

It means that, for the first time, copper, brass and bronze products can be marketed legally in the US using public health claims and they could play a key role in fighting hospital acquired infections.

This registration follows a year of comprehensive laboratory testing which showed copper alloy surfaces to be effective against five different strains of bacteria* including the hospital superbug *MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus)*.

The rigorous analysis of 3,000 samples of five different copper alloy samples was carried out through independent laboratory testing which followed EPA-prescribed protocols.

The tests showed that 99.9% of the bacteria on copper alloy surfaces (with 65% or greater copper content) were eliminated within 2 hours of exposure.

The US EPA recognition also follows research at Southampton University in the UK, which has shown that *MRSA* microbes remain alive on stainless steel surfaces for up to three days, whereas the same microbes on a copper surface are eliminated within 90 minutes.

According to the EU Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) there are 3 million healthcare-associated infections in Europe each year and 50,000 deaths.

Already a number of hospital trials** have been launched all over the world to demonstrate copper's antimicrobial properties in a clinical environment. As part of the trials, frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, grab rails and bathroom fixtures are being replaced with copper alloys in a bid to reduce the amount of disease-causing bacteria in hospital wards.

It's expected that the results will show that antimicrobial copper, brass and bronze are a highly effective addition to hand washing and standard infection control practices in combating potentially deadly pathogens.

About the European Copper Institute

The European Copper Institute (ECI) is a joint venture between the world's mining companies (represented by the International Copper Association, Ltd) and the European copper industry. Its mission is to promote copper's benefits to modern society across Europe through its headquarters in Brussels and a network of eleven Copper Development Associations.

* 1. *Staphylococcus aureus*, 2. *Enterobacter aerogenes*, 3. *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, 4. *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, 5. *Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

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