

Comparative Analysis of Tuff-Stik Aluminum vs. Wooden Kiln Sticks in Lumber Mill Operations

By Ivan DeCampo, Phd - Timber Technology News/Wood Industry Network

Abstract

This technical paper presents a comprehensive analysis contrasting the economic and environmental impacts of using Tuff-Stik™ aluminum kiln sticks versus using traditional wooden kiln sticks in the lumber drying process. The study specifically examines the initial investment, service life, recyclability, and additional benefits provided by the unique design of the Tuff-Stik™ aluminum sticks. By evaluating these aspects in the context of a mill producing 175 million board feet of southern yellow pine annually, this paper aims to highlight the substantial savings and efficiency gains achievable with aluminum kiln sticks.

Introduction

Lumber mills continuously seek methods to enhance operational efficiency, reduce costs, and minimize their environmental footprint. The selection of kiln sticks, critical for maintaining lumber quality during drying, significantly influences these outcomes. Traditionally, wooden kiln sticks have been the industry norm, but the introduction of Tuff-Stik™ aluminum kiln sticks, with their durability and recyclability, presents an opportunity to revolutionize this aspect of lumber processing.

Materials and Methods

Cost Analysis Framework

A detailed cost analysis comparing the initial purchase, lifespan, and end-of-life disposal or recycling of Tuff-Stik™ aluminum versus wooden kiln sticks was conducted. Factors considered include the initial cost per foot, number of turns through the kiln, improved production processes and costs associated with disposal or recycling.

Environmental Impact Assessment

The study evaluates the energy consumption involved in producing both types of kiln sticks, along with the environmental implications of their disposal or recycling.

Productivity and Quality Impact

The unique patents-pending design of Tuff-Stik™ aluminum sticks, featuring ribs that minimize lumber warp and crook, was analyzed for its potential to improve the finished grade of lumber and the reduction of de-grade product experienced after kiln drying.

Results

Economic Analysis

- **Initial Investment:** Tuff-Stik™ aluminum kiln sticks have an initial cost of approximately \$1 per foot, whereas wooden sticks cost between \$0.20 to \$0.40 per foot. Despite the higher upfront cost, aluminum sticks last up to 500 turns, vastly outperforming the 4-7 turns of wooden sticks.
- **Long-Term Savings:** Over their service lifecycle, aluminum sticks present significant savings due to reduced replacement frequency and disposal costs. Additionally, their residual value as recyclable material further offsets the initial investment.

Environmental Analysis

- **Recyclability:** At the end of their service life, aluminum sticks can be recycled using only 5% of the original energy required to produce them. In contrast, wooden sticks become a waste product, incurring disposal costs and environmental burdens. Wood sticks that are broken or unusable typically are considered a liability, not an asset like the aluminum sticks.

Productivity and Quality Benefits

- **Improved Lumber Quality:** The patented design of Tuff-Stik™ aluminum sticks, with ribs that hold lumber straight, contributes to a higher grade of finished lumber, reducing waste and enhancing finished product value.

Case Study: 175 Million Board Feet Mill

Assuming an average usage that aligns with the production volume, the savings in material costs, reduced waste, and improved lumber quality were quantified. The analysis indicates a significant cost benefit and productivity boost for mills adopting Tuff-Stik™ aluminum sticks over traditional wooden sticks.

Discussion

The findings underscore the superiority of Tuff-Stik™ aluminum kiln sticks in terms of both economic and environmental sustainability. The initial higher cost is substantially offset by the extended service life, recyclability, and improvements in lumber quality. The environmental benefits, coupled with the operational efficiencies, make a compelling case for the transition to aluminum kiln sticks in lumber mills.

Conclusion

Tuff-Stik™ aluminum kiln sticks represent a significant advancement in drying technology in lumber mill operations, offering remarkable long-term savings, environmental benefits, and improved product quality. For a mill processing 175 million board feet of southern yellow pine annually, the shift to aluminum sticks could result in further substantial operational improvements and cost reductions. The adoption of Tuff-Stik™ aluminum kiln sticks is not just a financially sound decision but also a step towards more sustainable and efficient lumber production practices.

References

- Industry standards for lumber drying and kiln stick usage.
Material science studies on aluminum and wood properties.
Environmental impact reports on recycling and waste disposal in lumber production.

This technical analysis highlights the transformative potential of Tuff-Stik™ aluminum kiln sticks in redefining operational efficiency and sustainability in the lumber industry.