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IICL Launches Test Container Fleet Alternative Floor Designs in Field Trials

Washington, DC - The Institute of International Container Lessors (IICL) announces that it has, in collaboration with 13 ocean carriers, placed 400 containers into a live test program to determine the effectiveness of two alternative floor designs that significantly reduce wood usage in the manufacturing of containers.

Flooring systems are important and expensive components of containers. Over the fifty years of modern containerization, hardwood has proven to be the material of choice for the dry container floor. In a typical dry container, the hardwood plywood is the material that is used to as the flooring surface and is supported by a steel sub-floor. As a container floor should be capable of handling the rigorous demands of cargo handling, durability, resiliency, cost effective repairs and cleaning are key attributes.

In 2005, the IICL members, recognizing that the availability and quality of the hardwood used in the flooring of containers was declining, initiated a project with the goal of reducing the quantity of wood used in the floors of new containers by approximately minimum fifty per cent. "Our membership's Technology Committee formed a working group to evaluate methods of achieving the goal and this initiative is a major step forward in meeting this goal," said Steven R. Blust, president of the IICL." With the ever-increasing demand on our global forests, we believe that through this project and other initiatives currently underway, the IICL and the container industry overall, will do its part to help achieve the sustainability of our forests in the years ahead."

In 2007, at its Hong Kong Flooring Forum, the IICL presented five alternative designs to the participants for their review and evaluation. The alternatives were configured to reduce the wood used by approximately fifty least fifty percent. This was achieved with four of the containers having a combined wood and steel floor and one contained a floor made completely of steel. The participants which included ocean carriers, flooring manufacturer's container manufacturers, as well as other service providers, observed and evaluated the five different designs.

From the results this forum, two of the designs were selected for further evaluation-the extended tunnel design with a steel tunnel running down the middle of the container and wood on either side, and the Omega design, which alternates longitudinal wood and steel "planks" on the container floor in addition to extended sills in the front and rear. The two designs after further testing and refinement were approved by the IICL for a live test to learn if the design changes would be serviceable in actual use and acceptable to ocean carriers and cargo interests.



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IICL Prototype Containers



IICL Omega Floor

400 containers have been built, 100 containers of each design built in both 20 foot and 40 foot lengths, and have been placed in test service by thirteen ocean carriers, for evaluation during the next year. The ocean carriers and the IICL will monitor the effectiveness and durability of the containers during this period, including periodic inspections.

“With the global demands on forest products ever-increasing, the availability of quality material, especially Asian hardwoods, is declining and the long term viability of wood flooring in containers is being threatened, unless steps are taken to bring supply and demand into a sustainable and long term balance” said Blust. “The IICL’s objective to reduce the wood content in containers by fifty percent should help to achieve the sustainability of the world’s hardwood forests.”

The IICL is also pursuing other initiatives to improve container flooring. Equally important to the quantity of wood used in the manufacturing of containers, is the quality of the plywood that is used in the floors. Container floors, under normal operating conditions, should not shorten the useful life of the container. If a container floor fails prematurely, the container floor or possibly the entire container must be replaced. The additional wood stock that is required in replacement of the failed floor will exert greater demands on the wood sourcing. Through high quality manufacturing of the plywood, maximum life of the plywood can be achieved while minimizing the quantity of wood actually used during the service life of a container.

To assist its members in identifying quality flooring manufacturers, for the last three years, the IICL has conducted audits of flooring manufacturers. The auditors assess manufacturing processes, measure performance, and provide meaningful feedback to the manufacturers. The auditor report their findings to the IICL upon which individual members are able review and make decisions concerning flooring sourcing for their containers. “The audits have been extremely useful to our members in assessing the performance and products offered. We have recently invited other companies and organizations to participate in the voluntary program. Several members of the Container Owners Association (COA) are joining in the audit program and we look forward to their participation,” said Blust. “We are also requesting that flooring manufacturer’s place their company marks on the floors so that we can verify the source.”



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Alternative materials to replace hardwood flooring are also being evaluated. Bamboo, petroleum based products, and recycled materials are attractive due to their renewability or recyclability and their potential to emulate the performance of hardwood. The IICL is working with material manufacturers and processors in the development of these alternative materials.

Results of the flooring test program and other efforts will be made available upon completion of the one year evaluation period.

The Institute of International Container Lessors, Ltd. (IICL) is a trade association, organized in 1971, representing lessors of maritime containers and intermodal chassis. Its member companies are Amficon, CAI, Cronos, Flexi-Van, Florens, GE SeaCO, Gold, Seacastle, Textainer, Trac, TAL International and Triton. IICL members own or manage approximately 90 percent of the global leased container fleet, representing nearly half of the world container fleet and half of the U.S. chassis fleet operated by ocean carriers, railroads, and other companies. The IICL is active in governmental, regulatory, educational, technological, environmental and security issues. In addition to its widely accepted publications and annual inspector certification examinations, the IICL offers a wide range of educational training courses.

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For more information please visit IICL's website at www.iicl.org , send an email to: info@iicl.org , or call 1.202.223.9800