APPLYING polyethylene boots to the bases of posts adds value, protects the wood, and keeps chemicals away from the soil. The PostSaver PS-2000 automatic post booting machine utilizes high-intensity infrared heat lamps that melt the inner layer of bitumen and cause the polyethylene outer layer to shrink tightly to the vulnerable portion of the post or pole.

Treaters Give Posts The Boot

Looking for value-added opportunities beyond the basic wooden post, pressure treaters, wholesalers and dealers have begun offering posts with their in-ground "rot zones" sealed in polyethylene.

Maine Wood Treaters, Mechanic Falls, Me., has installed the equipment to apply PostSaver polyethylene boots and has begun taking orders.

"This is a perfect product by virtue of removing the wood from contact with the ground, probably doubling its life," explains Maine Wood Treaters' Hal Bumby.

The system consists of a specially formulated polyethylene boot lined with an inner layer of a meltable bituminous sealant that protects the lumber across a wide range of operating temperatures and moisture contents over a long period of time.

PostSaver can be applied to treated wood or durable untreated species such as cedar and redwood.

The boot provides a double-barrier system to protect the post from the elements that cause decay and premature post failure. This requires that only the vulnerable, in-ground area of the post be "shrinkwrapped" with the boot. The heat-shrinking process liquefies the bitumen and drives it into the wood. This provides a secondary moisture-resistant layer while the polyethylene outer layer provides a tough physical barrier.

Don Bratcher, Conrad Forest Products, Arbuckle, Ca., doesn't blame pressure treated wood for its sometimes shorter lifespan. He says that with rot on treated wood, "95% of the time the post was installed improperly. PostSaver eliminates that."

Bumby agrees: "I look at [PostSaver] as a treatment—similar to a preservative. As a wood treater, my purpose is to increase the durability of wood using an exterior application. Whether it's ACQ or PostSaver, I don't have a conflict."

Environmental advantages are a major consideration for Bumby, whose New England territory includes a number of organic gardeners fearful of chemically treated wood.

"The pressure treated wood industry has and is losing market share to composites and alternative products—maybe for the wrong reason," notes PostSaver's John Makuvek. "Lumber is a renewable resource. Lumber makes better sense. Here's a chance for the lumber industry to regain lost ground."

In doing so, the entire distribution chain can profit. Bumby estimates the system "adds from 25% to 30% to the cost of wood, similar to pressure treating."

"There are margin opportunities for the dealer," adds Bratcher. "If a guy's working on a 20% mark-up, like they say, 20% of $10 is better than 20% of $6."

Still, it's not a large enough difference to scare off the buyer. "From a consumer standpoint, if they're replacing 100 feet of fence, it would add maybe $60 or $70 to the total cost—for a fence they'll probably never have to replace," Bratcher explains.

"The post and pole industry is a commodity-oriented business and adding value is a real challenge," Makuvek says. "Compare a dealer's sell prices to purchase prices of posts. Dealers sell truckloads of posts, but the big profit comes from the accessories such as fasteners, non-structural composites, stain, etc. The PostSaver boot provides the dealer with a value-added product to offer. It gives them the opportunity to sell a 'long-life post system.' The end user's perception of the product is extremely high, and we see easy upsells every day."