

TECHNOLOGY

Fire prevention tech aims to reduce insurance costs

Russell Hixson May 26, 2021



BARRIERTEK — BarrierTek conducts a large-scale test of fire suppression technology. The Alberta company built two identical structures and then treated one with its fire-prevention coating designed to protect structures during construction.

New technology out of Alberta aims to protect projects from fires during construction and help bring down rising insurance costs.

BarrierTek CEO Mike Baker said he worked with chemistry experts to develop the company's new coating that can be applied to wood structures during the construction phase to reduce the risk of catastrophic fires.

Baker explained BarrierTek-treated structures do not allow fire to leave the point of origin, dramatically reducing fire damage and protecting the community.

Baker said he is eager to get his business ready to apply the technology to multi-family residential projects in Western Canada. This means getting the machinery and equipment in place to meet demand.

He explained fires at projects like this can impact many families, many development partners, insurers and the surrounding community.

He added that wood, a renewable resource, has been used for centuries to build structures and the industry will continue to use it and insurers will continue to insure it.

"We are hoping to be able to pull insurance costs down," said Baker, who noted the last year has seen steadily rising prices. "Insurers don't want to be exposed to fire risk."

Insurance brokers stated that rates in the construction sector have gone up 10 to 20 per cent in the last 18 months.

Baker noted even if a builder does everything right to prevent torches, heaters and lighting from starting fires, the top cause is still vandalism or arson.

“The big cause is fires that are set on purpose,” Baker said. “And it doesn’t take a lot to get a fire going.”

While Baker has had the product put through many laboratory tests, he wanted to really put it through the paces in something less predictable.

This month he conducted a large-scale burn experiment to present a comparative analysis between two three-storey wood buildings, one constructed with BarrierTek fireproof coating and the other untreated standard construction.

Both buildings were identical in construction and were ignited with an equal amount of fuel-load. Baker said the experiment demonstrated that structures treated with BarrierTek coatings prevent fires from spreading uncontrollably.

“We now have models to show how the fire flows through a building, how the heat transfers and we can see what happens,” said Baker. “It was about as real of a scenario as you could get, and I was anxious. I am very happy with how it went and it gave us a lot of data to take to insurance companies.”

The product can be applied to I-joists, lumber, panels and more.

[To see the experiment click here.](#)

You can register to view BarrierTek’s virtual experiment on June 16 [here](#).

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