



Checking for Substandard Roofing Battens

Purpose

This toolbox talk highlights what you need to do, and think about, before and during the installation of roofing battens.

Hazards and Risks

- A sub-standard batten may not take the weight of an operative whilst using as a roof ladder which could result in an injury to the operative or a third party. **Please note that walking mid-span between rafters is not advised.**
- Sub-standard battens which have been incorrectly graded or treated may rot prematurely, which reduces the effectiveness of any fixings and increases the risk of tiles/slates coming off the roof.

Introduction

Due to the high demand for treated timber, compounded by shortages and supply chain issues. There are now large quantities of sub-standard roofing battens within the UK market that are being marked, coloured and sold as conforming to BS 5534 when in fact they are an inferior product and highly likely to impact

performance and longevity of a roof should they be used. These sub-standard, inferior battens are becoming an increasingly serious issue for merchants, roofing contractors and their clients.

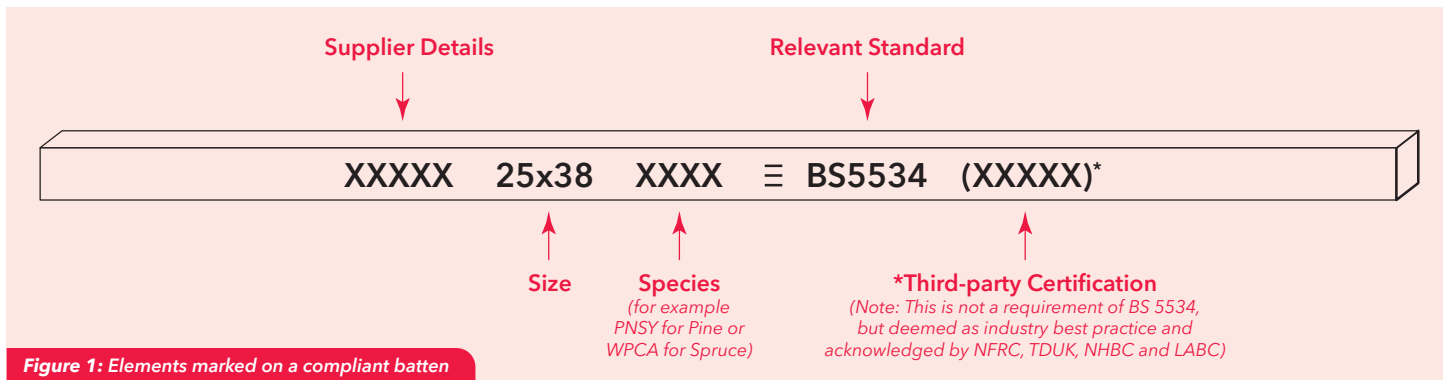
Health and Safety

The use of inferior battens that do not conform to BS 5534 has the potential to cause roof failures and accidents. HSE guidance, **HSG33 Health and Safety in Roof Work**, states that battens must be a minimum size of 50 mm x 25 mm (maximum span 600 mm) or 38 mm x 25 mm (maximum span 450 mm) and meet the grading requirements specified in BS 5534: *Code of practice for slating and tiling*, also noted in NFRC Technical bulletin 33—*Graded battens for slating and tiling*.

Non-compliant battens should not be installed. Ungraded or part-graded battens may prove weak and vulnerable to failure should the roofer inadvertently walk on these areas whilst covering the roof.

What to look out for

Graded BS 5534 roofing battens should be stamped with the following:



However, marking alone is not proof that the batten has been graded correctly or that it is of the correct standard.

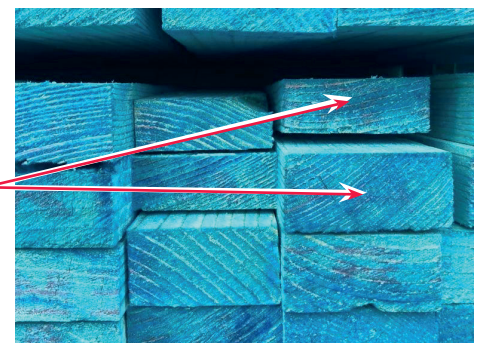
FIVE SIMPLE STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN

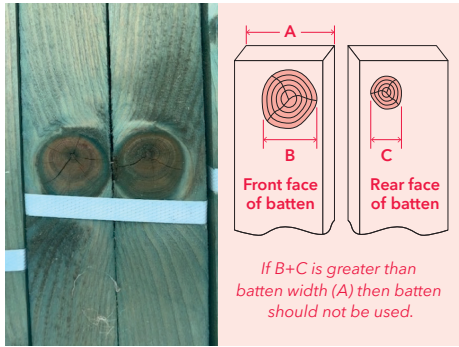
Step 1

Check the thickness of the battens. 25 mm thick batten should be 25 - 28 mm thick but never less than 25 mm.

Checks can be visual where discrepancies in thicknesses are obvious, or the batten can be measured with a tape measure, ruler or measuring gauge.

Unequal thickness of roofing battens visible in a stack is a sign of substandard battens, which should not be bought or used.





Step 2

Check the size of the knots that are visible on both faces (*widest sides of a batten*). Measure the knots on each face—at the widest point, (*width*), these two sizes added together should not exceed the width of the batten being used, 50 mm on 25x50 batten, and 38 mm on 25x38 batten. These images show battens with non-compliant knots, which should not be used.



Step 3

Do not rely on a coloured roofing batten to be compliant. Give each pack of battens a visual check before opening the pack. Each batten should be individually stamped with the information highlighted. This image shows coloured battens, but they are not individually stamped and so do not conform to BS 5534. Please note that labels and stickers are not a substitute. The batten should be stamped.



Step 4

Timber battens graded to BS 5534 should not contain any rot, decay or signs of insect infestation. If you see evidence of rot, decay or insect holes in a batten, do not use it and alert your supervisor or Contracts Manager.

Step 5

Check the documentation with each delivery of batten, it should state at least the following:

- Name of supplier (*the company that graded the roofing battens NOT the distributor*)
- Origin (*imported and/or the timber species code*)
- Graded in accordance with BS 5534
- Basic size
- Type of preservative (*where applicable*)

If you have any concern that a roofing batten does not comply, or is ungraded, then you must not use the batten, and must report it to your Contracts Manager or supervisor at the earliest opportunity.



Questions

1. Name two of the four markings that should be visible on a graded batten?
2. Can a compliant roofing batten be less than 25 mm thick?
3. Is a coloured batten proof of the batten being graded?
4. What should you do if the battens that you have been given are showing signs of rot or decay?

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