



Substandard Roofing Battens

Due to the high demand for treated timber (compounded by the shortages and supply chain complications created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK's exit from the EU and the war in Ukraine), there is now an abundance of sub-standard roofing battens within the UK market that are being marked, coloured and sold as BS 5534 compliant, when in fact they are counterfeit. These sub-standard goods are becoming an increasingly serious issue for merchants, roofing contractors and their clients.

Using non-compliant battens may result in the contractor having to strip and re-roof a property should the battens be proven to be substandard, and a significant health and safety risk is

created by the contractor using non-compliant battens as a foothold as this is in contravention to the guidelines set out in HSG33: Health and Safety in Roofwork.

Using battens that have an inferior quality to certified roofing battens will reduce the longevity of the roof and can potentially put roofing operatives at risk of harm.

What to look out for

BS 5534 states that all graded roofing battens should be marked with the elements shown in Figure 1.

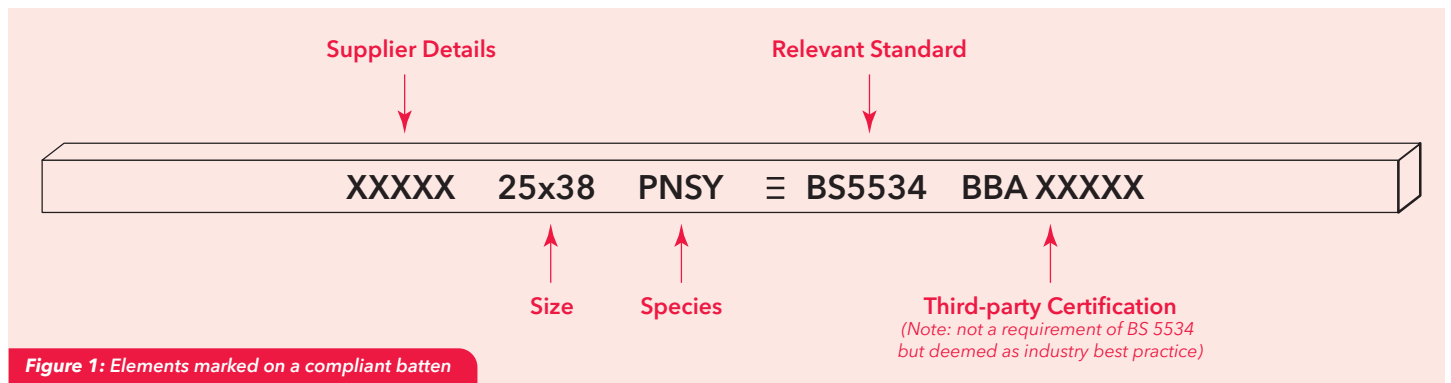


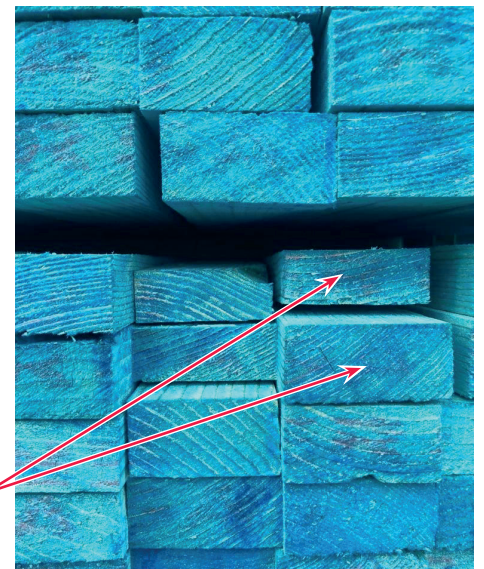
Figure 1: Elements marked on a compliant batten



However, marking alone is not proof that the batten has been graded correctly or that it is of the correct standard, so there are a few simple steps that can be taken.

1. Check the thickness of the batten, as BS 5534 states that a batten should be 25 mm thick with a tolerance of -0/+3 mm. Therefore a roofing batten less than 25 mm thick (see picture on the left) should not be purchased or used.

Unequal thickness of roofing batten visible in a stack is a sign of substandard battens—these should not be purchased or used.



2. Check to see if any knots are present. BS 5534 states that *'the sum of both faces can be no more than the width, i.e. 38 mm/50 mm'*. Therefore, if a knot is visible on both sides of a batten, when added together the overall size should not be more than 38 mm or 50 mm. Below shows images of battens with excessive knots, that **should not be used**.

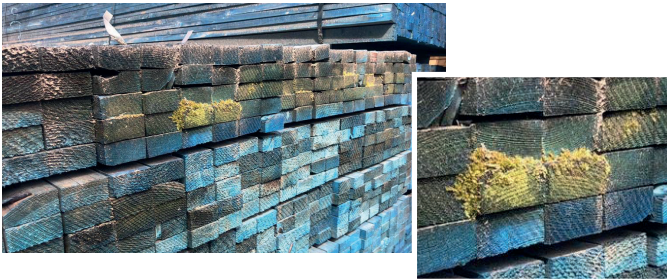


3. Do not rely on the colour of a roofing batten to guarantee that it is compliant. Over the years, different manufacturers have coloured their battens as a visual aid to prove compliance, but the organisations that supply substandard products are also aware of this and colour their battens. The image (right) shows marked coloured battens, but they do **not** conform to BS 5534.



Note: All battens should be individually marked.

4. BS 5534 graded battens should not rot. If you see signs of rot, decay or growth on a batten, **do not use it**.



5. Documentation—All roofing battens that are compliant with and graded to the requirements of BS 5534 will either be delivered to site with the correct documentation, or the documentation should be available from the merchant. Always request a copy of this documentation and any third-party certification, and retain these records.

Health and Safety

The use of inferior battens that do not comply with BS 5534 has the potential to cause roof failures and accidents. This risk of accidents increases when the roof battens are being used as an alternative to a roof ladder and are therefore taking the additional live load of the operative installing the roof. 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* and NFRC Technical bulletin 33—*Graded battens for slating and tiling*.

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

When using battens as footholds, the weight of the roofer must always be on or as close as possible to the rafter/batten junction where the fixings are. The roofer's foot should be above the rafter wherever possible, rather than on the batten and under no circumstance should the roofer deliberately walk mid-span on battens with open rafters.



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020 7638 7663

helpdesk@nfrco.co.uk

www.nfrco.co.uk

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