

Network Rail terminates procurement of hardwood sleepers and replaces with Sicut composite sleepers

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Network Rail, the UK's railway infrastructure manager, has confirmed the business decision to cease all hardwood sleeper procurement from June 2024 and to deliver against its value, circular economy and environmental commitments through the alternative use of Sicut composite sleepers.



Sicut sleepers installed in Coatbridge

In its October bulletin, titled **"Composite Sleepers - A Substitute for Tropical Hardwood"**, Network Rail said: "In 2021, Network Rail ceased the procurement of softwood sleepers due to environmental and safety concerns. The tropical hardwood used in the production of our hardwood sleepers can take up to 100 years to grow and the increasing demand for this material contributes to deforestation of the world's tropical rainforests.

To continue our journey towards improving sustainability of our track, the next phase and in agreement with the Executive Leadership Team is to cease the procurement of tropical hardwood sleepers by June 2024. These will be replaced by composite sleepers made from recycled plastics.

The composite sleeper supports Network Rail's transition to a circular economy, keeping our materials in use for as long as possible. Our current composite recycled plastic sleeper supplier Sicut uses UK recycled domestic plastic waste. At the end of its life, the sleeper can be recycled into a new sleeper or repurposed for a different use. When compared with hardwood, the composite sleeper provides expected whole life value savings of between £1,801 and £4,387 (per sleeper install).

Substituting hardwood for composite will also save over 30 thousand tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) in carbon emissions over their expected life, helping us to meet our Net Zero ambitions and reducing our impact on deforestation."



Sicut sleepers being installed on Sherrington Viaduct



Sicut sleepers installed at London Kings Cross

Commenting on Network Rail's announcement, **William Mainwaring, CEO of Sicut**, said: "What a great commitment by the Network Rail Board in support of its environmental strategy and its value commitments to the ORR. More than 5 years of testing and evaluation of the Sicut composite sleepers through the NR approvals process, combined with extensive whole life cycle value and independent carbon modelling, and the widespread adoption of the Sicut sleeper on a growing number of significant projects across the country has clearly given Network Rail the confidence to make this important decision. While it has taken a long time, everyone at Sicut, a UK company, is immensely proud of the part we have played in enabling this historic transition by our national railway.

By using Sicut composite sleepers instead of hardwood, Network Rail has identified that it will not only deliver significant savings, but also vital environmental benefits: from reduced embodied carbon, improved biodiversity, utilisation of waste materials, and supporting the circular economy, all while increasing the tracks resilience to climate change.

Sicut prides itself in being a solution provider and our in-house engineering and R&D team continue to work closely with Network Rail, other track asset managers around the world and our partners to develop custom solutions for the track infrastructure.

Sicut Enterprises Limited is the market leading supplier of fibre reinforced composite sleepers made from recycled plastics. Sicut proudly manufactures its composite sleepers in Middlesbrough in the heart of the UK's Northern Powerhouse from locally sourced plastic waste. To date, Sicut has supplied thousands of its sleepers to Network Rail, following its full approval in 2021.

Outside of the UK, Sicut sleepers have also been successfully installed in heavy haul, mainline and public transport networks across more than 20 countries around the world including Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, the USA and Australia. Sicut also has manufacturing facilities in the USA and is planning new facilities in Europe and Australia.

Contact our team of experts today for more information about Sicut and its innovative products: