**AgriCulture, Elkton company helping with export testing**

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**Mill Creek Lumber/Polo Pallet Manufacturing**, an Elkton company, worked with researchers from **Virginia Technical Institute** on a way to protect wood for export without using chemicals.

The method being tested with support from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the US Department of Agriculture uses steam and vacuum to remove fungi and parasites.

**Zhangjing Chen**, lead researcher at VTI said the steam and vacuum method is faster — taking hours instead of days — and does not use a fumigant called methyl bromide. The chemical is already banned for most uses in the United States and European Union except for certain forest products.

Use of methyl bromide makes American forest products unwelcome in the export market so the success of the VTI research is vital.

“A recently drafted Economic Adjustment Strategy identified development of this technology as a critical component of retaining and growing Maryland’s forest-based industries,” said **Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio**, Maryland Secretary of Natural Resources. “We were pleased to support this initiative recognizing steam vacuum treatment as an environmentally-friendly method to get Maryland products to the market, potentially through our own ports.”

**Don Beazley**, owner of Mill Creek Lumber on East Old Philadelphia Road, said he was contacted by Maryland Department of the Environment about using his business for a test run.

“They said they were treating logs for export out of the country,” Beazley said.

**Upper Shore Regional Council** provided grant funding for the project that would become the first test shipment out of the US to the Czech Republic.

“This is a test for the industry to prove that treatment of logs with vacuum and steam will work,” said Ron Mack, commodity treatment specialist with USDA.

Methyl bromide treatment takes days and soaks a log completely. However Zhangjing said that’s not necessary since the organisms of concern live in the outer 2-3 inches of the logs. The steam/vacuum takes three hours.

Once the testing is complete in Europe it would re-open exports, increase business at the Port of Baltimore and open markets to forest industry in the US for wood products here, which are used in veneers in Europe.

“The science behind the process has taken years to develop, but the system itself is simple to use,” Beazley said. “Its adaptability to different wood products, including the pallets we produce, can bring about new export opportunities to Maryland’s small businesses.”

Once the testing is completed and the result published in 2022 those doors will open.

“This is a key moment for international commerce in Maryland,” said **Kelly M. Schulz**, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Commerce. “This innovative technology process will reestablish Maryland and the Port of Baltimore as a destination for veneer log exports, which is a billion-dollar industry in the United States.”