

# Australian MDF vs. Imitations

Buying in a modernised market, such as Australia, gives buyers the comfort of knowing there are certain regulations and standards that manufacturers must meet. When it comes to kitchen cabinets, there are standards that apply to the MDF panels used to make most new cabinets. Australian manufacturers are required to comply with these standards. They include physical and mechanical properties and health and safety requirements for low formaldehyde emission.

Although Australian manufacturers comply voluntarily, substandard MDF can and is being imported into the market. This imported MDF may or may not meet the Australian Standards since there are no controls on what is being imported. Dr. Halligan from the Australia Wood and Paperboard Association states in *The Air We Breathe*, "All Australian made Particleboard and MDF have a formaldehyde classification of E1 and are stamped "Australian made LFE E1", meaning "low formaldehyde emission". Unfortunately, some imported panels are stamped low formaldehyde emission but testing has shown that these products are six or seven times higher than the E1 Australian Standard. So it is necessary to confirm Australian manufacture as well as LFE.

In other words, low quality MDF is being imported into Australia that is being labelled to look as though it has met the Australian Standards when it has not.

## Why Does This Matter?

So what if kitchen cabinet panels are low grade, imported MDF? Most furniture is imported too. Well, it matters for three reasons:

- 1. Safety.** All MDF is made with a binding resin that emits formaldehyde. Once an MDF panel is cut, the formaldehyde is released, causing a health risk for workers and homeowners. Low quality MDF is typically made with more formaldehyde. Australian Standard E1 MDF contains 9 grams or less of formaldehyde per 100 g, which is generally regarded as a safe level. Although paint seals and stops some formaldehyde emissions, it doesn't stop it all.
- 2. Cost.** Inexpensive MDF panels are likely low density. When low density MDF is cut, there is a fuzzy fibrous finish exposed that requires numerous paint coats to create an even surface.  
  
Low Quality MDF + More Paint Coats which is more expensive than Quality MDF + Fewer Paint Coats
- 3. Durability.** Low grade MDF may swell or break when it comes in contact with water. If it's not sealed properly, it will warp or expand. Using Low grade MDF increases the risk of homeowner complaints and warranty replacements.

Not all imported MDF is low quality. You can get very good quality MDF imported, but you have to be aware of the classifications and what is in the MDF. According to Australian Standards, MDF should be labelled E0 or E1 and LFE. For kitchens or other high moisture areas, it has to be moisture resistant MDF. If you are concerned about what is in your MDF panels, ask the manufacturer for information on the MDF material composition. They should be able to supply you with documentation. If not, walk away. Maintaining high standards will ensure the Australian public will continue to trust and value Australian cabinet makers. When there are low cost alternatives readily available, Australian cabinet making needs to outshine the rest. Let's keep "Australian Cabinet Makers" synonymous with quality. And we can only do this if we do it together.

## More information on different MDF products:

<http://www.gunnersens.com.au/products/buildingproducts/mdf.html>

**Standards for Australian manufactured MDF panels.** Refer to MR MDF (p.19) as all kitchens should be built with it: [http://www.ewp.asn.au/library/downloads/ewpaa\\_facts\\_about\\_pb\\_and\\_mdf.pdf](http://www.ewp.asn.au/library/downloads/ewpaa_facts_about_pb_and_mdf.pdf)

You may encounter MDF that is rated with the international classifications, such as E0 or E1. In that case, refer to : <http://www.amrosia.com/doyouneedtobuy0e1e2carbormdfparticleboardandplywood/>

Here is more information about MDF and the common brand names sold in Australia:

[http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/good\\_wood/wb\\_compos.htm](http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/good_wood/wb_compos.htm)

Thank you to guest contributor Danica Hoppe.