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Occupational allergic contact dermatitis following exposure to the Central American hardwood cocobolo

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Exposure to various exotic woods can cause allergic contact dermatitis (1). We report a rare case of occupational contact dermatitis after exposure to a Central American rainforest wood (cocobolo) from the tree *Dalbergia retusa*.

Case Report

A 61-year-old man was referred with a relapsing eczematous rash on the face and hands with subsequent spread to the arms and genital region. Apart from asthma and migraine, his previous medical history was unremarkable. Being a woodwork teacher, he was able to link four episodes of dermatitis to occupational exposure to *Dalbergia retusa*. The facial dermatitis (Fig. 1) occurred following exposure to dust produced from the sawing and crafting of wooden decorations. Patch testing was performed with the European baseline series, with Finn Chambers[®] (8 mm; SmartPractice, Phoenix, AZ, USA) on Scanpor[®] tape (Norgesplaster A/S, Norway). Additional testing was performed with dust and scrapings from the wood material applied to the skin 'as is'. We applied the patch tests to the patient's upper back, and occluded them for 2 days. Readings were performed on day (D)2, D3, and D7, according to ICDRG recommendations (2). We recorded a 2+ reaction to the dust and scrapings on D2 and D3, and a 1+ reaction on D7 (on D3, the patient had started to apply clobetasol cream once daily). We reported the case to the National Board of Industrial Injuries, and instructed the patient to avoid contact with cocobolo wood, which resulted in rapid clearance of dermatitis.

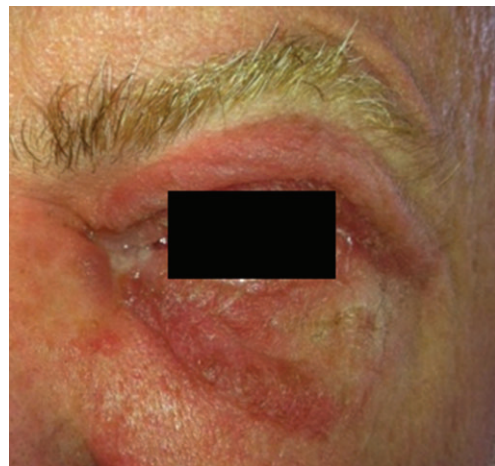


Fig. 1. Periorbital allergic contact dermatitis in a woodwork teacher following exposure to cocobolo hardwood.

Discussion

Cocobolo is a hardwood of the tree *Dalbergia retusa* native to Central America (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama). Cocobolo wood is popular because of its beautiful, deep red–brown colour, fine texture, and great strength, which makes it ideal for knife handles, wooden jewellery, musical instruments, and other craft products. A search on PubMed identified eight case reports (three in German) describing allergic contact dermatitis caused by cocobolo wood in woodworkers and in consumers exposed to cocobolo bracelets and necklaces (3–10). The present case report describes occupational allergic contact dermatitis following exposure to the commonly used cocobolo wood. Surprisingly, there are only a few reports in the medical literature, despite its well-known sensitizing potential, as mentioned in various timber/woodworking websites.

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