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NIIST 'wood' goes to the shop floor

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Open-and-shut case: A door panel made of polycoir, the fibre polymer composite developed by NIIST. Photo: By Arrangement

The Hindu

With hardwood becoming a scarce commodity all over the world, furniture manufacturers are constantly on the lookout for an eco-friendly alternative.

The National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST), a constituent laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) here, has developed the technology to make a wood substitute from natural fibre polymer composites. The institute is signing an MoU with the Kerala Furniture Consortium on Wednesday to commercialise the technology.

Clusters

Based at Perumbavoor, Ernakulam, Kerala Furniture Consortium Private Ltd. (KFCPL) is one of the seven innovation clusters benchmarked by the National Innovation Council under the chairmanship of Sam Pitroda. It is a Common Facility Centre (CFC) to pursue seasoning, designing, standardisation, testing, and finishing of rubber wood for manufacturing furniture.

Named polycoir, the natural fibre polymer composite developed by the CSIR-NIIST, has been found to be a suitable substitute for wood. The composite material utilises coir fibre and other natural fibres such as banana, jute, and sisal.

Suresh Das, Director, CSIR-NIIST said there is great potential for employing many unutilised or underutilised lingo-cellulosic fibres for making composite material. "The material can be engineered as per requirement and it possesses several unique properties such resistance to fire, termites, and water. Surface properties and physical and mechanical attributes may be fine-tuned as per requirement," Dr. Das said in a press note issued here on the eve of signing the MoU.

Under the terms of the agreement, the coir composite developed by CSIR-NIIST will be adopted by the KFCPL as a substitute to hardwood. Further technical development required for commercialisation of fibre composites will be undertaken jointly by CSIR-NIIST and KFCPL.

K.P. Raveendran, Managing Director, KFCPL, said the consortium had plans to bring out a range of knockdown furniture series by the end of the year.

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