

WHAT IS “GREEN” / CERTIFICATION / LEED?

“Green” is in vogue right now. Consumers are asking for it. Retailers are demanding it. But do they really know what they want? Consumers may ask for it, but part of the problem we’re running into is that they don’t really know what they mean by “green.”

Green certification grew more mainstream in 2007, while the rancor between certification systems and their proponents simply grew. For more than a decade, certification has largely failed to catch the public’s attention – and their wallets – but, the illegal logging issue and global warming seems to have given it new legs. Certification is now being touted by some certifiers as the only way to guarantee the consumer wood purchases aren’t contributing to illegal harvesting.

The growth in “green building” also gave forest products certification a huge shot in the arm, although in the US, that boost largely fell to FSC-certified producers, the only stamp recognized by the Green Building Council’s LEED standards.

In 2007, many in the hardwood industry decided it was better to join the certification movement than to continue fighting it. Most told us they elected to certify for the market access it would provide, now or in the future, not because they expected to make any money on certified lumber, or even pay back the cost of certification.

There’s no ignoring the momentum in the overall green building market. According to the US Green Building Council, the product and services market for green building is expected to exceed \$12 billion this year. As consumer awareness continues to increase and suppliers fill the secondary wood products market with green material alternatives, the environmental movement will likely continue its momentum.

“Companies should determine what consumers are asking for, take the time to learn about the green building initiative and be prepared,” said Timber Products’ Roger Rutan at a press gathering at AWFS. “It doesn’t happen overnight and the time to start is now because there is an opportunity to differentiate your company.”

Developing a green strategy now is a good way to set your company apart in the markets you serve. If you wait, your competition will soon fill the void.

What is forest certification and how will it protect our forests?

Forest certification was launched over a decade ago to help protect forests from destructive logging practices. Like the “organically grown” sticker on produce, forest certification was intended as a seal of approval – means of notifying consumers that a wood or paper product comes from forests managed in accordance with strict environmental and social standards. For example, a person shopping for flooring or furniture would seek a certified forest product to be sure that the wood was harvested in a sustainable manner from a healthy forest, and not clear cut from a tropical rainforest or the ancestral homelands of forest-dependent indigenous people.

What is forest management certification?

Forest management operations that meet the principles and criteria for environmental, economic and social standards are awarded the certification seal. Candidates for certification undergo a detailed on-the-ground assessment that includes input from all interested parties, species inventories, management plan reviews and forest inspections. Forest management certification is valid for 5 years subject to successful completion of annual audits.

What is Chain-of-Custody?

Chain-of-Custody (COC) is the path taken by raw materials harvested from a certified source through processing, manufacturing, and distribution until it is a final product ready for sale to the end consumer.

What is Chain-of-Custody Certification?

Operations that use certified materials or that purchase and sell certified products can earn Chain-of-Custody (COC) certification. COC certification ensures that a product bearing the label can be verified to contain sufficient quantities of certified materials. COC certification is awarded for a 5-year period subject to successful completion of annual audits.

Chain-of-Custody is the path taken by raw materials from the forest to the consumer, including all successive stages of processing, transformation, manufacturing and distribution.

Operations that have been independently verified for Chain-of-Custody certification are eligible to label their products with the logo of the certifying agency.

How do I obtain COC certification for my company?

There is a several step process that must be completed before a company is granted a COC certificate:

1. Contact an accredited certifier.
2. Submit an application to the certifier. This application will give the certifier necessary information to determine if COC certification is feasible for the client company.
3. Complete an on-site audit. The certifier will send a qualified inspector to the manufacturing site to determine that appropriate systems will be in place to keep records of certified inventory. Upon completion of the inspection, the certifier will send an assessment report to the client for review.
4. Certification approval. If the inspector deems that the facility and processes in place are adequate, and term provisions are mutually agreed upon, he will grant a COC certification. The client and the certifier will both sign a contract agreeing to the terms of the assessment.
5. Annual audit. The certifier will conduct an on-site annual audit of each client to ensure that the terms of the certification agreement are being kept. Certifiers also reserve the right to conduct short notice inspections of the client's facilities and records.

Certifying Agencies

In the United States, the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC) and the American Forest and Paper Association's Sustainable Forestry InitiativeSM (SFI) are vying to become the certifying programs of choice. Surprisingly, the FSC and SFI standards for good forest management are remarkably similar, and getting more so.

What is FSC-US?

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a non-profit organization devoted to encouraging the responsible management of the world's forests. FSC sets high standards that ensure forestry is practiced in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable way.

Landowners and companies that sell timber or forest products seek certification as a way to verify to consumers that they have practiced forestry consistent with FSC standards. Independent certification organizations are accredited by FSC to carry out assessments of forest management to determine if standards have been met. These certifiers also verify that companies claiming to sell FSC certified products have tracked their supply back to FSC certified sources. This chain of custody certification assures that consumers can trust the FSC label. For more information on FSC, please visit <http://fscus.org>.

What is SFI?

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program is based on the premise that responsible environmental behavior and sound business decision can co-exist.

SFI program participants practice sustainable forestry on all the lands they manage. They also influence millions of additional acres through the training of loggers and foresters in best management practices and landowner outreach programs.

This unique commitment to sustainable forestry recognizes that all forest landowners, not just SFI program participants, play a critical role in ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of our forests.

Only companies and organizations that have successfully completed an audit, by an independent and accredited certification body can claim certification to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) standard. SFI certification audits are rigorous, on-the-ground assessments, conducted by highly qualified and objective individuals.

Of the leading certification schemes in operation in the US, only the SFI program has a strict separation between standard setting and accreditation of certifying bodies. Recognized international protocols (ISO) for auditing explicitly require that these functions be separate. For more information on SFI, please visit <http://sfiprogram.org>.

Who can I contact for more information or to have my business certified?

Listed below are two (2) of the many organizations that are able to provide certification services:

Scientific Certification Systems

2200 Powell Street

Suite 725

Emeryville, CA 94608

Tel: (510) 452-8000

Fax: (510) 452-8001

Website: www.scs1.com

SGS – Systems & Services Certification

201 Route 17 North

Rutherford, NH 07070

Tel: (201) 508-3000

Fax: (201) 508-3193

Website: www.sgs.com

What is LEED?

Green building standards primarily rely on point systems. For each “green” material you use, you can earn points toward the building being certified as environmentally friendly. While all the standards include incentives for improving the environmental footprint of a building, some of the detailed standards are based more on preference than science.

The most widely accepted green building standard is **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)** which was developed by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). LEED does virtually nothing to promote use of wood as an environmentally friendly product. In fact, green points can actually be earned for home certification by not using wood in walls or not using wood sheathing. The idea behind removing wood from walls is that it reduces the need for

toxic pest control. Oddly, the most common alternative to wood studs is metal, hardly a renewable resource.

By requiring renewable resources to be regenerated in 10 years or less, LEED all but limits green credits for flooring to bamboo, linoleum or cork flooring. Bamboo flooring is another prime example of a “green building” product that gets a lot of respect, while hardwood floors are ignored. Bamboo floors may be made of a quickly regenerating plant, but there are now many complaints about wear. The problem is likely due to manufacturers harvesting the bamboo before it is mature, leading to softer floors that may warp or dent easily. Research is also lacking on the long-term sustainability of high-intensity bamboo plantations without substantial fertilizer and weed control. Bamboo flooring is also held together by glue and may contain high levels of formaldehyde, a known carcinogen. Hardwood floors, on the other hand, can last over 100 years with proper care. Hardwood is so durable that one of the hottest green building trends is to make floors from reclaimed hardwoods. In many cases, the flooring is milled from wood taken from old barns and industrial buildings.

Wood flooring is also limited to FSC-certified wood, something that is mostly available to tropical species. The USGBC is considering changing the requirements so that lumber certified under other programs, such as the Sustainable Forest Initiative[®] or Canadian Standards Association would qualify. However, the plan would then be to award additional points to FSC-certified wood, again favoring wood from overseas, where (certified or not) the environmental impacts of sawmills are far less regulated than in North America.

After reviewing LEED for potential for potential use in future government buildings, the US Commerce Department determined LEED was far from the only useful certifier of green buildings. In its report, Commerce Department reviewers concluded that many of the points awarded in the LEED certification process were arbitrary and were not necessarily focused on environmental protection.

The LEED Green Building Rating System[™] is that nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED gives building owners and operators the tools they need to have an immediate and measurable impact on their buildings’ performance. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. LEED provides a roadmap for measuring and documenting success for every building type and phase of a building lifecycle. Specific LEED programs include:

- * New commercial construction and major renovation projects
- * Existing building operations and maintenance
- * Commercial interiors projects
- * Core and shell development projects
- * Homes
- * Neighborhood development
- * Guidelines for multiple buildings and on-campus building projects
- * LEED for schools
- * LEED for retail

How is LEED developed?

The LEED Rating System was created to transform the built environment to sustainability by providing the building industry with consistent, credible standards for what constitutes a green building. The rating system is developed and continuously refined via an open, consensus-based

process that has made LEED the green building standard of choice for federal agencies and state and local governments nationwide.

What is LEED certification?

The first step to LEED certification is to register your project. A project is a viable candidate for LEED certification if it can meet all pre-requisites and achieve the minimum number of points to earn the certified level of LEED project certification. To earn certification, a building project must meet certain pre-requisites and performance benchmark (“credits”) within each category. Projects are awarded certified, silver, gold, or platinum certification depending on the number of credits they achieve. This comprehensive approach is the reason LEED-certified buildings have reduced operating costs, healthier and more productive occupants, and conserve our natural resources.

Note for product manufacturers and service providers:

Although USGBH does not certify, promote, or endorse products and services of individual companies, products and services do play a role and can help advance green building, while also achieving your own environmental and economic goals.

Who can use LEED?

Everyone: Architects, real estate professionals, facility managers, engineers, interior designers, landscape architects, construction managers, lenders, government officials, etc.

The LEED program also includes a full suite of training workshops and professional accreditation programs to develop and encourage green building expertise across the entire building industry. For more information, please visit <http://www.usgbc.org>.

LEED vs. Green Globes™

Growing interest in buildings that are better for the environment, healthier for occupants and more cost-efficient to operate is helping to drive the popularity of green building rating systems such as LEED and Green Globes™.

Fundamental similarities, significant differences

Comparing LEED and Green Globes™, one finds many similarities. Part of the reason is that they both evolved from the same source – the Building Research Establishment’s Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM). Ideas as to what constitutes green building also tends to be widely accepted, so it stands to reason that both systems emphasize things like energy, water and resource efficiency, sit ecology, indoor air quality and pollution.

If you have any questions about green, certification or LEED, please contact the WPMA office at (978) 874-5445.

Some of this information has been compiled from articles from the following publications:

Modern Woodworking Magazine

Weekly Hardwood Review

Wood & Wood Products Magazine