

## **Materials Matter: Why Green Builders Should Specify FSC Woods and Wood Products**

By Blair Seibert, AIA, LEED AP

If you're serious about making sure projects are truly, deeply "green," then it's important to consider the source of your wood materials.

Woods intended for fully green projects should come from forests managed by the Forest Stewardship Council. The first LEED Platinum home built by LivingHomes in Santa Monica, California used FSC woods for siding, millwork and floors. Because it was a prefabricated/module home, the structure was steel.

As is the often case with sustainable materials, there is some additional cost and FSC products come at a 20% premium compared to traditional wood products. But there's compelling reason to use them. By learning more about these FSC-certified products, hopefully you'll be encouraged to talk to your earth-sensitive clients about using them.

There are numerous sustainable forest certification systems, the four largest being the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) a global program, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) only applicable in Canada, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) typically used in the US and Canada, and the Pan European Forest Certification Scheme (PEFC) recognized and used in up to 14 European countries.

The FSC logo is:



Be aware that some other certification logos look strangely similar. Just as the definition of "organic food" varies from state to state, all forestry certification programs are not created equal. The FSC program is the only one not influenced by the wood product industry and it is independently verified and credible according to the US Green Building Council and a large group of global stakeholders.

FSC forests are selectively harvested every 20 or more years and preserve the natural beauty and abundant wildlife in the forest. Prior to harvest, experienced staff review the conditions of the woods and each tree to determine which trees might be at risk of dying before the next visit, which trees would benefit by remaining in the forest and which should be removed due to growing conditions that are not supportive of their needs. Six months after selective cutting, the sun on the forest floor sprouts new life.

There's a chain of custody that occurs with woods and products from these forests. Similar to USDA-certified products, there's a formal process each of the wood products passes through. The process can be very cumbersome for manufacturers, but it ultimately assures green builders of the products' origins.

The FSC guidelines include elements like environmental impact, indigenous people's rights, community relations, monitoring, and independent third-party verification as part of their criteria. Domtar, the third-largest producer of FSC-certified papers provided the following succinct list of the FSC's 10 Principles & Criteria:

- #1 **Compliance with laws and FSC principles**  
Adhere to all local laws and FSC standards
- #2 **Tenure and use rights and responsibilities**  
Heed all legally defined long-term tenure and use rights.
- #3 **Indigenous Peoples' rights**  
Respect indigenous peoples' rights; encourage participation in forest management.
- #4 **Community Relations and worker's rights**  
Support the social and economic well-being of forest workers and communities.
- #5 **Benefits from the forest**  
Employ forest resources efficiently and respectfully
- #6 **Environmental Impact**  
Conserve the integrity of forest ecosystems
- #7 **Management Plan**  
Detail long-term management objectives and the means of achieving them in an up-to-date plan
- #8 **Monitoring and assessment**  
Monitor and assess forest condition with regards to social and environmental impact
- #9 **Maintenance of high-conservation value forests**  
Maintain or enhance the attributes which define such forests.
- #10 **Plantations**  
Ensure that plantations, if any, complement the management of, reduce pressures on, and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests.

For full details of the Forest Stewardship Principles & Criteria refer to:

[http://www.fscus.org/images/documents/FSC\\_Principles\\_Criteria.pdf](http://www.fscus.org/images/documents/FSC_Principles_Criteria.pdf)

In contrast, traditional forests are typically clear cut. Clear cutting eliminates the animal habitats and eliminates the land's ability to naturally sustain itself. If trees are replanted it may take as long as 20 -100 years for them to grow large enough to be economically harvested again. (Note that the Green Globes green rating system allows SFI woods.)

I recently spoke to a student of global economics. When I told her I was a sustainable design consultant and was researching sustainably managed forests she became very interested. As she explained it, educating other countries about ways in which to sustain their natural resources is considered a critical task for her profession in the days ahead. More and more it's important to help people understand that stripping their countries' resources may provide immediate financial benefit, but it will create a problem for the following generations.

What's more, in developed countries, we need to understand that our appetite for wood affects the lives of people around the world.

Beyond buying wood, there are many ways we can reduce our demand for virgin, non-sustainable wood. When purchasing copy paper, look for paper with recycled content. When you visit the printer for new cards, letterhead, brochures and photo paper, think about 100% recycled papers like one of Domtar's six lines of EarthChoice papers.

Two paper manufacturers in California now offer FSC papers. They are: New Leaf Paper in San Francisco and Thoro Packaging in Corona. There are 24 other FSC paper manufactures. A list of all 26 can be found at [http://www.fscus.org/images/documents/FSC\\_certified\\_paper\\_manufacturers.pdf](http://www.fscus.org/images/documents/FSC_certified_paper_manufacturers.pdf)

The health of our planet and its people depends upon the way we treat the earth. Looking for wood products from FSC forests is the first step in being part of the solution of more careful stewardship of the earth's resources.

For more information, check out a report by a group of Non-Government Organizations called "Behind the logo, An environmental and social assessment of forest certification schemes" available at <http://www.fern.org/pubs/reports/behind/btlrep.pdf>. This site explains in detail the difference between the forest management systems discussed above.

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