



FACT SHEET

COMPONENTS: CERTIFIED WOODS: LUMBER, VENEER, COMPOSITES

Description

Certified wood products are third party certified as having been grown and harvested under specific forest management criteria. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has established standards for forest management and processing which ensures, through a certification process, those standards are adhered to. In addition to the forest management criteria, FSC also addresses issues relating to logging operation impacts on local communities and indigenous peoples, and works to promote their interests where beneficial to wood production. An industry-sponsored program, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), has lower standards than FSC and has not been endorsed by national and international organizations such as the World Wildlife Foundation, the Wilderness Society, the Natural Resource Defense Council, the Rainforest Alliance, the World Resources Institute, or the US Green Building Council.

Recommendations

- Determine the highest volume uses of wood on your project and select FSC-certified products for these applications. The Certified Forest Products Council (CFPC) offers assistance identifying availability of products, www.certifiedwood.org.
- Select locally grown, certified products whenever possible to further reduce the environmental impacts associated with transportation and improve social and community benefits.
- Use domestic hardwoods in place of imported tropical products.

Criteria Summaries

Cost: Certified wood products can range from 0-10% higher in cost. Generally, the overall cost of wood in home construction is less than 10% of the total budget; therefore use of certified wood would have a maximum 1% increase to the overall budget.

Availability: Certified wood products are becoming more available, and some major retailers, like Home Depot, are beginning to carry partial lines of certified woods. Generally, lumber and plywood in most typical sizes are available. Finish woods such as plywood and veneer for carpentry and woodwork are available, along with lines of engineered wood products, siding, flooring, doors, and furniture.

Energy: There are no operational energy impacts associated with the use of FSC-certified woods. Energy for material transportation is reduced if locally-grown and harvested products are utilized.

IAQ: Certified wood products have the same air quality impacts that typical wood products have. Wood naturally off-gasses formaldehyde and all wood products used on the interior should be coated to prevent off-gassing. Certified engineered wood products are made using the same types of resins as non-certified products, only the wood fibers come from a certified source, so it's important to protect against off-gassing by coatings (paints, varnishes, etc.).

Expected Product Life: The life expectancy of certified wood products is the same as typical wood products.

Practice: Certified woods and wood products are tooled, machined, and installed the same as traditional products. Adjustments in finishing products, such as stains or varnishes, may be required if less-common alternative wood species are used for finish applications.

Environmental Context

Wood has been described as an “environmentally superior” building material because it is created using solar power, has the potential to sequester carbon (thereby reducing global warming), improves local water and air quality, creates habitat, and requires the least amount of energy to process compared to most building materials. However, the current state of affairs in industrial wood production do not promote diverse habitat, instead they degrade and destroy forest ecosystems, contribute to erosion problems and loss of topsoil, which pollutes streams and rivers. Clear cut harvest machinery contributes to poor air quality and reduces the overall benefits of stretches of forest.