



By Doug
Martin

The 'green' myth

Ask 100 people what they think "green" means and you will most likely get 100 different answers:

- Cleaning the air by reducing carbon emissions.
- Cleaning up the ground by reducing the volume of garbage.
- Recycling items that would otherwise go to the dump.
- Cleaning up the oceans, lakes and rivers of pollution.
- Using solar energy rather than fossil fuel to heat buildings.
- Creating more energy-efficient buildings.
- Creating clean fuel for cars.
- Not cutting down trees.
- Using bamboo in place of wood.

And on and on the list goes. But just what does green mean to the wood and wood products industry? Who is deciding what green is or is not? And are they qualified? Are they making the right decisions? What might this so-called "green movement" do to our industry if it keeps moving in the same direction?

So many questions. But who is going to provide the answers? I hope it is all of us who work in the wood and wood products industry, and not the masses who do not. Otherwise, many of you reading this may find yourselves looking to other industries for employment.

I would like to cite one very important example of how our industry may be marginalized, and therefore limited as to what we can purchase from a very small segment of the world's forests.

In today's "green building" movement, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system is the most successful such program in the world. Administered by the U.S Green Building Council (USGBC), the LEED system is now in use in more than 14,000 construction projects in 30 countries, including all 50 United States.

However, the USGBC has not included a life-cycle analysis in the LEED rating tool, nor does it force producers of any other building material — most notably steel and concrete — to offer an environmental certification system. Why is wood treated differently?

Even within its own certification system, wood is marginalized, and the availability of certified wood is minimized to only that which is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

It appears to me a large percentage of members on the LEED Steering Committee, or at least those who are on the Materials and Resources Technical Advisory Group 7 (MR TAG 7) "certified wood" committee, do not realize their own guidelines will force builders to use materials that are not renewable, not sustainable and have "carbon footprints" that are up to 10 times larger than those left by wood production. MR TAG 7 guidelines restrict the points on wood products to two, and these points can only be earned through FSC certification.

Those of us who work in the wood and wood products industry need to make our voices heard by the USGBC and LEED organizations.

We need to get them to do a life cycle analysis on all building products. We need to get them to set the same standards for nonwood products as they do for wood. And within the MR TAG 7 certified woods, we need to convince LEED to allow other certification systems, such as the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC).

If we do not do this, LEED's exclusive usage of FSC will contribute to the continuing downward trend for wood usage, and will increase the use of materials that are NOT as renewable and sustainable ... and not as green.

You see, long before people in "the new world" began to understand the risks of dwindling timber supplies, European countries saw firsthand the potential danger of overharvesting. From Germany's proactive 18th century commitment to renewable forestry to England's reforestation efforts in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, many countries learned these lessons well.

In this tradition, PEFC was founded in 1999. Stemming from the rich, longtime customs of sustainable forestry in Europe, PEFC has grown to impressive, global proportions. Today, its Sustainable Forest Management criteria are supported by 149 governments worldwide, cover-

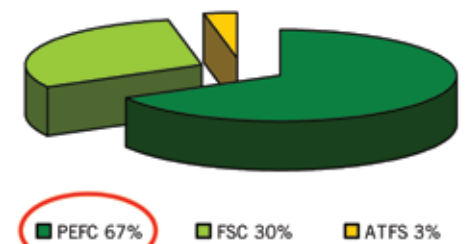
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ing 85 percent of the world's forest area. PEFC respects and integrates each country's forestry practices, using a structure that works in tandem with local governments, stakeholders, cultures and traditions.

Yet, in some circles, PEFC and its European roots are inexplicably frowned upon. So why, as the demand for green renewable resources continues to grow, does LEED insist on an exclusive arrangement with a single certification scheme? Why do they not accept PEFC?

In the North America market, PEFC is understood as an umbrella standards organization that represents multiple standards worldwide using a rigorous application process and thorough assessments for endorsement. FSC is also an umbrella standard with 28 regional standards endorsed worldwide. Therefore, the two schemes are very similar.

Whenever the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) are presented, they promote the fact that they are under the PEFC umbrella, a quality that gives their customers a global reach. Governments such as those in the United Kingdom and Germany, as well as customers from around the world, have assessed, accepted and recognized PEFC.



Share of global certified forest area by the three major schemes (as of May 2007)

Geneva UNECE Timber Committee Market 2007

The USGBC has never explained, to my knowledge, why it awards a point for FSC, but not for other certification systems.

A recent Yale University study that was sponsored by the USGBC assessed the SFI, CSA, FSC and PEFC certification systems, with all systems given the opportunity to comment. The study compared PEFC standards to the FSC's Pacific Coast regional standards (which covers just 0.7 percent of all FSC land worldwide), and standards used by CSA and SFI.

Concerns with the report were recently communicated to the USGBC in writing by PEFC. Following are some excerpts from this communication:

1) SFI has argued that PEFC should be compared to FSC international criteria. Both FSC and PEFC are international umbrella organizations designed to endorse national or regional standards. This similarity is not brought out sufficiently in the report. One of the most important differences between these two standards is that you can become certified under an FSC unendorsed standard, but you cannot become certified under a PEFC unendorsed standard, contrary to the description on page 21 (of the study), which leads the readers to believe the inverse is true.

2) To be PEFC endorsed, a standard must complete a rigorous endorsement process which includes 60 days of public consultation on the endorsement of the standard, a 300+ question application, a third-party assessment of the standard and how it meets standards development, forestry content, CoC (chain-of-custody), certification and accreditation requirements, peer review, as well as voting by all members of the PEFC. The FSC process to endorse a standard does not include a contracted third-party assessor that travels to the country to assess the standard and interview stakeholders and parties concerned; nor does it include the public posting of completed applications; nor does it include 60 days of consultation; nor does it include peer review; nor does it include a ballot vote of FSC membership.

3) In fact, 40 percent of all FSC certifications worldwide are FSC standards that have NOT been fully endorsed by FSC. This means a product could be labeled as FSC and be sold into LEED systems, but in reality the product has not been fully endorsed as FSC standard. Therefore these unendorsed standards may not fully meet FSC's standards development requirements that are to determine forest management requirements in an open, transparent and balanced way.

4) PEFC also, like the other assessed standards, does have a process for resolving corrective actions.

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.

Recently, in a conversation with a representative from one of the largest sawmills in the United States, I was told about one of every nine containers they sell to a certain customer in China is certified. So eight containers are not certified. However, 100 percent of the product that the Chinese company sells back to the United States is sold as FSC certified. I was told the company exports most of their production here, so the 12 percent that is certified would not be enough to cover all of the product that is exported to the United States as FSC certified.

Who out there will hold them accountable? This is a question I feel has been left unanswered. If someone does have the answer, I would like to know.

So far, PEFC support in respect to getting the USGBC and LEED to accept its certification has come through the CSA and SFI, whose endorsement standards make up more than half of all PEFC lands worldwide. The American Tree Farm Standard (ATFS) is under review by PEFC for endorsement, and they also have taken part in actions to get PEFC and their own standards recognized by LEED.

SFI, CSA and PEFC have been closely working with trade associations, builders, architects, government officials and others to promote their certification schemes. In addition, trade groups such as the Forest Products Association of Canada, American Forest Products Association, the Green Building Initiative, and many more associations at regional levels are working with architects, builders, city planners, etc., to ensure that all certification policies are inclusive (i.e., not FSC only).

So as I see it, LEED is not leading us in the direction that we in the wood and wood products sector need to go. LEED needs to accept PEFC and other certification standards. If they do not, we will not have the volume of certified wood needed for all the LEED jobs. We will not have the right product mix, nor will the wood be affordable, which will lead to more builders specifying other

nonwood building materials.

Lets come together and help redefine "what is green." Certified wood from certified forests is the most truly green product we have on earth. Please, let's all do our part to let the world, LEED and the USGBC understand why this is so important.

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Information source list:

- <http://www.usgbc.org/>
- <http://www.pefc.org/>
- Assessing USGBC's Forest Certification Policy Options; A summary report prepared by the Yale Program on Forest Policy and Governance – September, 2007