

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE

BUILDING GREEN WITH SFI-CERTIFIED WOOD PRODUCTS



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Good for you. Good for our forests.™

BY KATHY ABUSOW
PRESIDENT AND CEO, SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE

Life cycle research shows wood is an excellent environmental choice for any construction or renovation project – as long as it is from a well-managed forest. But how can you be sure you are specifying products that have been logged legally from well-managed forests when wood is traded to and from jurisdictions across the globe?

The answer is not as complicated as you might think because internationally recognized forest certification standards can provide this assurance. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program has been improving forest practices across North America and promoting responsible procurement globally for over a decade. That's good for the forests and good for green buildings.

Third-party certification bodies audit organizations to ensure their forest management and their tracking and procurement of forest products meet the rigorous requirements of the SFI Standard. If the certification is granted, the SFI label can be applied on building products, allowing builders and consumers to make choices that reward responsible forest management.

Before joining SFI Inc., I was a forest certification consultant and watched SFI evolve to become an internationally endorsed, fully independent, registered non-profit charitable organization, with a three-chamber board of directors that has equal representation from the environmental, economic and social sectors.

Today, SFI-certified products are recognized by programs such as the Green Building Initiative's Green Globes and the National Association of Home Builder's green building systems in North America and BREAAAM in England. The 135 million acres of SFI-certified lands across North America provide a secure supply of products to meet any building or design need – backed by certified SFI procurement systems and SFI chain-of-custody labels.

Those who take the time to understand green building understand the need to embrace renewable wood products from well-managed sources. We are seeing the results of this every day, and it is good news for the green building movement and the environment.

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently turned back a bill that would have mandated the LEED Gold rating for commercial buildings larger than 50,000 square feet. The governor said he felt the bill "would create a bias for certain building materials over others without a clear benefit. For instance, the use of California wood building construction materials is highly discouraged in favor of foreign grown bamboo and wheatgrass."

The U.S. Green Building Council that puts out the LEED green building rating tools is contemplating whether to expand its current point system beyond recognizing Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification to give credit to renewable materials like wood and to recognize other credible forest certification standards such as SFI.

I have long challenged the belief that certified wood from Indonesia or a plantation in Brazil is somehow a better choice for sustainable buildings in North America than SFI-certified wood from Maine or from Canada's boreal forest.

SFI has a balanced governance structure, conducts risk assessments to avoid illegal sources of supply, protects species at risk, maintains wildlife habitat, promotes sustainable harvesting and prompt regeneration, requires third-party accredited certification audits and makes audit reports publicly available.

With only 10 percent of the world's forests certified, it's time to turn our attention to the 90 percent of the world's forests that are not certified – especially since many of them are in offshore jurisdictions that lack strong forest laws or fail to enforce them.

Forest certification is a significant tool in the marketplace and among policy setters. Builders, architects, companies large and small can use their buying power to improve forest management simply by choosing SFI-certified products. Even if you have no plans to seek a green rating for a project, using SFI-certified products sends a clear signal to customers that you care about the forests.

Kathy Abusow was named president and CEO of SFI Inc. in 2007 after operating a successful forest certification and market acceptance consultancy for 15 years. She is highly respected as a technical expert on certification standards and related marketplace issues such as procurement policy design and green building rating tools.