



SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE

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The Facts on Responsible Forestry – Interim Standards & Standards Development

There is a perception in the marketplace that FSC is the “gold standard,” yet there are over 28 different FSC standards around the world and fiber from many more unendorsed standards is being used in FSC labels and claims.

FSC Allows the Use of Unapproved “Interim” Standards

There are 28 FSC-approved standards in 20 countries, and yet 79 countries report FSC-certified areas on the FSC database. This means there are more than 50 countries claiming FSC certifications where there are no fully endorsed FSC standards. Statistics on the FSC International website show that at least 86 million acres/35 million hectares of FSC-certified lands worldwide – 25% of total FSC-certified lands – are certified to draft or interim standards.¹ Fiber from these lands is allowed to be used in products with the FSC label. This means these standards may not have gone through the usual FSC public input process and through a FSC national standards development committee. Current estimates are that one-quarter of all FSC’s “certified” fiber comes from unendorsed standards.

FSC policy in *Structure, Content and Local Adaptation of Generic Forest Stewardship Standards* (FSC-STD-20-002 (V3-0) EN) 2009:² “In areas in which there is not yet an FSC-accredited Forest Stewardship Standard certification bodies may therefore carry out certification according to their own ‘generic’ standards, adapted to account for the local conditions in the country or region in which they are to be used with input from local stakeholders.”

Despite these facts, FSC continues to allow FSC campaigning groups and FSC US Board members to claim that FSC is the “gold standard.”

Greenpeace US and FSC-US board member: “FSC is a uniquely democratic space for environmental, social and business interests to debate forest management issues. FSC continues to be the gold standard for forest certification.”³

Market place misinformation is causing confusion as evidenced by statements from well-respected customers:

- Indigo Books & Music: “FSC is the gold standard for sustainable forestry certification and ensures responsible sourcing of paper products. Indigo is committed to seeing an even wider adoption of FSC and more FSC-certified books on our shelves.”⁴
- Kruger Products news release 2011: “FSC is recognized worldwide as the gold standard in responsible forest management and is supported by native peoples, environmental groups, labour unions, and industry. The FSC logo provides a guarantee that the forest products you purchase come from healthy forests and strong communities.”⁵

Bottom Line

The “gold standard” does not follow the “golden rule”. The internationally accepted “golden rule” in standardization is that a standard must be approved and issued by a standards development organization, with a date *indicating when it becomes valid*. “This “golden rule” is respected by all national and international standardization institutions that are members of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), Committee on Conformity Assessment (CASCO), and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and come under ISO guidelines for standards development, approval, accreditation of certification bodies, audit practices, and certification. The FSC operates independently of these organizations.”⁶ FSC allows certifications prior to having a valid and endorsed standard in many countries.

The SFI Standard is used to certify about 197 million acres/80 million hectares across Canada and the United States. The SFI Standard is endorsed by the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)⁷ which has standards developments and certification requirements based on ISO and IAF rules and guidelines. All certification bodies conducting SFI audits must be accredited by a North American member of the International Accreditation Forum, i.e. ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB), American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or the Standards Council of Canada (SCC).

The SFI Standard is revised every five years in an open transparent process. The SFI 2010-2014 Standard was the outcome of an 18-month public review process with two public comment periods (60 and 30 days), and was approved by the independent SFI Board of Directors.⁸ The SFI External Review Panel, an independent panel of experts, ensures that the development and revision of the SFI Standard embodies an open, fair and inclusive process that addresses the ideas forwarded through comments submitted. The SFI 2010-2014 Standard development process was launched in June 2008. SFI Inc. publicized the process at every step and during both public comment periods, SFI invited about 2,000 individuals and organizations to submit comments. The second comment period was supplemented by seven regional workshops. All comments received were posted to the SFI website and included an explanation of how SFI addressed the comments.

- ¹ FSC Certified Area: <http://www.fsc.org/facts-figures.html> and FSC Approved Forest Stewardship Standards: http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/national_FSC_standards/FSC_Aproved_FSS.pdf
- ² FSC policy document Structure, Content and Local Adaptation of Generic Forest Stewardship Standards (FSC-STD-20-002 (V3-0) EN) 2009 www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/accreditation_documents/certification_bodies/FSC-STD-20-002_V3-0_EN_Structure_Content_Local_Adaptation_Generic_FSS.pdf (page 3)
- ³ FSC-US news release July 2010 http://www.fscus.org/html_emails/standards_launch.html
- ⁴ FSC Canada website <http://www.fsccanada.org/quotes.htm>
- ⁵ Kruger Products news release announcing launch of My FSC Story <http://www.newswire.ca/en/story/853671/kruger-products-supports-launch-of-my-fsc-story>
- ⁶ Rotherham, Tony. 2011. Forest management certification around the world – Progress and problems. The Forestry Chronicle, Vol. 87, No. 5. 9p. Available at: <http://pubs.cif-ifc.org/doi/abs/10.5558/tfc2011-067> (page 610)
- ⁷ www.pefc.org
- ⁸ <http://www.sfiprogram.org/standard-development-process.php>

