



USGBC LEED V.4 - Reason for Negative Vote June 2013

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative[®] Inc. (SFI[®] Inc.) has voted "NO" on LEED v4 because the LEED rating tools do not recognize credible forest certification programs like SFI and ATFS, both internationally recognized by PEFC. Unlike other materials or products in green building, forest products have a proof point to demonstrate responsible sourcing, forest certification, which is built on close to two decades of standard setting, public input, and best management practices for responsible forestry. Globally, 10 percent of the world's forests are certified, and as such, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) which oversees the LEED rating tools should reward those market leaders, including domestic sources of supply that are part of the forest certification process, as this will ultimately create incentives for growing more certified forests and contribute to the USGBC's goal of market transformation.

Currently, USGBC's LEED rating tools only recognize FSC and yet, 90% of the FSC certified forests are outside the U.S. While the latest draft of LEED v4 does specify "FSC or USGBC-approved equivalent" within the "sourcing of raw materials" credit, unfortunately USGBC does not have a defined process in place to evaluate equivalency or criteria to determine equivalency. This could mean another decade of domestic, well-managed forests certified to SFI and ATFS not being recognized for LEED credits by USGBC, while forests certified to FSC the world over will be eligible for the LEED "sourcing of raw materials" credit.

Since 2005, SFI certified-products have been excluded from the forest certification/sourcing credit without ever once having been told the basis of that exclusion. In credible, open and transparent processes, organizations know the basis of their program standard's exclusion, and with that information they can do three things: make changes to be included; correct a misperception; or move on due to a lack of alignment between institutional objectives. SFI Inc launched its 18-month Standard review process this June. We encourage the USGBC leadership to clarify why FSC meets their credit expectations and why SFI's certification standard does not.

Given that USGBC does not have a defined process or criteria to determine "USGBC-approved equivalent" within the "sourcing of raw materials" credit, this means that automatically FSC standards around the world qualify for this credit. Without a defined process or criteria, it is unreasonable for USGBC to ask members to vote on what is incomplete language. USGBC also has no baseline for why FSC is the only standard(s) recognized in LEED v.4. The proposed language assumes FSC is applied consistently across the world, which is not the case. There are 28 FSC-approved standards in 20 countries. As a result, North American forest certification standards, including SFI, the American Tree Farm System, and the Canadian Standards Association, are at a disadvantage to FSC. SFI is in favor of green building and the use of responsibly managed wood products. To this end, SFI wants to see FSC, as well as SFI, ATFS

and other PEFC endorsed standards recognized in LEED v4. It is time to recognize the natural fit between responsible wood sources and green building.

We encourage USGBC members and leadership to review a recent *Architectural Record* Continuing Education Unit (CEU) on the merits of the SFI program. Readers can earn one GBCI CE hour for LEED Credential Maintenance and/or one AIA/CES HSW Learning Unit by taking the online test after reading the article - <http://ceu.construction.com/article.php?L=282&C=1106>. The CEU highlights the numerous organizations that recognize all forest certification standards equally, including the USGBC sponsored International Green Construction Code (IgCC), as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Education.

While some argue that it is only a few credits and not worthy of such attention, SFI Program Participants have noted that their sources of supply have been overlooked as designers and specifiers chase points to secure higher LEED ratings, which in turn means real jobs are on the line, in real communities where domestic or local sources of supply are being overlooked. Moreover, others in the supply chain that utilize LEED certification for their retail outlets or banks, often defer to LEED language when developing their own procurement policies for paper and other office supplies. One third of forests certified to the SFI Standard in the U.S. are state lands, where state foresters have made the decision to utilize forest certification as evidence of responsible management. The National Association of State Foresters has produced resolutions on both forest certification and green building that recognize choice in the marketplace, including SFI and ATFS certification and choice of green building tools that recognize the merits of wood products from well-managed forests.

USGBC has stated that the 2010 benchmark ballot demonstrated that USGBC membership views FSC as the "only appropriate standard to recognize within LEED." The 2010 forest certification benchmark vote was **not** a vote of whether to accept FSC or SFI, but was rather a vote on the benchmarks USGBC would use to assess the forest certification programs. SFI Inc. voted against the benchmarks because they represented an overly complicated and unworkable approach. The truth of the matter is only 521 USGBC members actually voted on the benchmarks, and half voted for the benchmarks, and half against the benchmarks. USGBC has never once put forth language to vote that is clear and clean and recognizes all forest certification standards explicitly. If they did, SFI Inc. is convinced that language would pass and USGBC could join the rest of the green building movement around the world that does recognize all forest certification standards without preference.

We look forward to working with USGBC to resolve this important issue. It is time for our organizations to work together, to promote responsible forestry and green building. We only ask that the next time language goes to vote, there is a constructive option that recognizes all forest certification standards explicitly – FSC, as well as SFI, ATFS and other PEFC endorsed standards. For more information on SFI and green building, please visit <http://www.sfiprogram.org/markets/green-building/> or contact, Jason Metnick, VP, Customer Affairs.