



Certification Groups Fight LEED Exclusivity Policy

USGBC needs to open the door to more than one forest certification program.



The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is facing increasing pressure from numerous organizations and thousands of individuals following its decision to continue to recognize only one forestry certification program. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. (SFI) is taking a leadership role and has been the most outspoken when it comes to raising awareness that the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system needs to recognize all credible forest certification programs, but they are certainly not alone as the list of allies and backers of the campaign continues to grow.

The proponents of having the USGBC recognize multiple certifications have a strong case for their argument. Right now, LEED only recognizes the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification program. It's fairly simple – if you don't use FSC certified wood in your building project, you can still attain LEED certification for your building, but you can't get the all important LEED forest certification point, something that is becoming increasingly essential to architects, builders and developers in today's green-conscious world.

By only recognizing a solo source of forest certification, the USGBC has effectively alienated and discriminated against other equally suitable, certifiable and credible certification programs. That's what SFI and many others are so strongly opposed to. They simply want the USGBC to recognize all credible forest certification programs, and that includes FSC, SFI, American Tree Farm System (ATFS), Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

To date, SFI has well over 5,500 signatures on a petition (<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/leed>) that calls for the USGBC to open LEED to all "wood and paper products certified to independent and credible standards." They also have some powerful backers calling for the recognition of multiple forest certification standards, including the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) president Steven Koehn, Society of American Foresters president Michael Goergen, Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty, Mother Nature Network director of environmental affairs Chuck Leavell, and numerous other political and business leaders, including the Canadian Council of

Forest Ministers. Can all of these highly respected individuals and organizations be wrong? If you want to see the support SFI president Kathy Abusow has for the rally against USGBC's single certification policy, just go to the SFI website and check out Abusow's blog and the related articles and comments – <http://www.sfiprogram.org/leed/index.php>. It's impressive.

Like Abusow, I'm not saying there is anything wrong with FSC. In fact, in my opinion, it is a well-respected, globally recognized certification program, but so are all of the others that should and could be recognized by the USGBC. By taking FSC's competitors for forest certification out of the equation, the USGBC could essentially create an artificial supply shortage of North American wood that can meet the LEED certification standard. This may force companies or organizations that want to attain the LEED standard to source FSC wood from outside of North America, and something the USGBC and FSC won't readily tell you is that the FSC standards are different for different regions of the world, meaning that an FSC certified board from a forest in South America, Russia or Indonesia may not have to meet the same criteria to be labelled FSC certified as a board from British Columbia, Nova Scotia, or Oregon.

Here in North America, less than one quarter of this continent's certified forests are FSC certified. The balance of North America's certified forests are certified under the SFI, ATFS, or CSA programs. Sourcing forest products produced here in North America not only makes economic sense by creating employment and a positive business climate at home, but it also makes environmental sense. How much of a carbon footprint is left by shipping finished lumber products thousands of kilometres from Europe, Asia or South America compared to sourcing wood products from your own backyard, or in this case, your own province or state, or a neighbouring jurisdiction?

If the USGBC is truly interested in increasing the amount of certified wood used in green building projects, it needs to open the gate and let other certification programs in. It's not like they would be doing something unprecedented or untested. Other highly respected green building programs around

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distributor of equipment for the wood and metal industries.

Wes Henderson, director of business development for Hermary Opto Electronics Inc. near Vancouver, B.C., says they went to WoodTech to showcase their DPS-824 Colour Vision Scanner and to promote the benefits of moving grade decisions from the planer mill to the sawmill.

“We were very pleased with all of the interest and inquiries that our Color Vision Scanner received at the show,” notes Henderson. “The benefits of moving grade decisions upstream into the green mill by using colour scanners at the edger and/or trimmer was the number one topic at our booth. Everyone seemed to agree that identifying visual features such as knots, rot, and stain earlier in the breakdown process is the next major opportunity for increasing value recovery in the sawmill, and we certainly felt the show was the right venue to promote that message.”

Justin Williams, CEO of Williams and White Inc., a Burnaby, B.C. OEM specializing in saw and knife technology, maintenance machinery, saw guides and filing room technologies, says his company has participated in the show for several decades and is a long term exhibitor.

“It was a small show in comparison to past years, but I felt there was an upswing in the level of optimism compared to the past couple of WoodTech shows,” says Williams. “The industry people that attended were serious, they were interested in our products, and they were looking to purchase equipment that would allow them to upgrade their facilities. That was extremely encouraging for us.”

In addition to the trade show, the WoodTech organizers delivered a conference schedule that included multiple



Over 1,200 people attended the WoodTech 2010 show in Portland, Ore. in March.

presentations on the first two mornings of the event. Brad Turner, vice president of Vancouver, B.C.-based Halco Software Systems Ltd., which specializes in simulation and optimization software, was one of the presenters. “Overall, the mood at the show was optimistic and the attendance figures and the participation at our seminar exceeded our expectations,” Turner says. “At our seminar, we had over 30 people and we had some good questions at the end, along with a lot of follow-up interest at our booth.”

The WoodTech show is held every two years, with the next one scheduled for March 13 to 15, 2012 at the Oregon Convention Center. For more information go to www.woodwideweb.com. 

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the world have done just that by recognizing numerous forest certification programs. Green Globes in Canada and the U.S., BREEAM in the United Kingdom, Built Green Canada, Built Green Colorado, CASBEE in Japan and the ANSI National Green Building Standard in the U.S., all recognize multiple forest certification programs.

At present, only 10% of the world's forests are certified to any system. Increasing this number and producing forest products that are certified to rigorously controlled and credible standards is one of the most important things we can do to raise the profile and credibility of our industry and to protect the environment. Forest products companies

and their customers along with industry associations, governments, environmental groups and organizations such as SFI, FSC, CSA, ATFS and PEFC have done a great job in making certification a much discussed topic around the boardroom tables of forest products producers and forest products purchasers. It all adds up to huge strides forward for the industry and the environment, but if the USGBC doesn't change their policy of only recognizing one forest certification standard, they risk pushing certification in our industry a big step backwards, while at the same time, they also risk being perceived as laggards instead of leaders in promoting sustainable choices. 

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