

Specifying responsibly sourced timber

As one of the largest buyers of timber products, the construction industry influences the type of timber in demand and has the power to significantly increase the call for sustainably sourced materials.

Architectural Designers New Zealand recently spoke to Simon Dorries, CEO of Responsible Wood, about the importance of designers specifying sustainably sourced timber for every project and the vital role Chain of Custody plays in ensuring sustainable forest management.

Responsible Wood was established in 2002 and they are pioneers in the development of certification standards for wood and wood products sourced from sustainably managed forests in Australia. The standards provide guidance and accountability for forest managers, manufacturers and suppliers. Their vision is to ensure Australian and New Zealand forests, and the products sourced from them, are the most sustainable in the world.

Globally, there are two major forest certification systems, they are Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In New Zealand, FSC certifies 1.3 million hectares and PEFC 600,000. While across the ditch, PEFC verifies 20.1 million and FSC 1.2 million hectares.

Approximately 11% of global forests are certified. New Zealand and Australia are punching high above the rest, with Australia 95% verified and New Zealand 70%. Approximately 65% of the global certified area is through the PEFC system.

Simon Dorries says in an ideal world, everything sold in Australia and New Zealand, that originates from wood, should come from a responsible source.

“We passionately believe that forest certification is a good thing. Forests globally need to be well managed. There are so many economic, social, and environmental benefits delivered by the process. It’s important that when you are specifying and purchasing you make sure that wood products used on your job site are from a responsible source.”

So, what drives certification in New Zealand and Australia? Simon says it’s down to legislation, Government procurement, the consumer, and the need for greater action around sustainability.

“Legislation, like the introduction of Illegal logging laws, increases the demand for certified materials. Governments around the world have policies in place around procurement and sustainability for the public sector which helps enormously. Consumers are becoming more environmentally aware, and when given the choice, if costs are comparable, they will lean towards the environmentally responsible product. In addition, the 17 UN sustainability goals all have a connection to sustainable forest management, which implies a lot, “shares Simon.

For members of the architectural design community, much of the drive for specifying certified timber is the relationship with Green Star and Homestar. Both rating systems place value on the use of sustainably sourced and certified materials.

According to FSC, the global construction output is expected to grow 85% by the year 2050, with construction generating almost 40% of all CO2 emissions worldwide.

The FSC says ‘this has significant consequences for climate change and that the industry has an opportunity to improve this outlook by adopting sustainable practices. If sourced responsibly, timber can play a crucial role in sustainability efforts. It’s beautiful, versatile, and high performing while using 24 times less energy to produce than steel.’

So, how do we ensure that the timber we specify has been sustainably sourced? This is where Chain of Custody becomes an essential part of the process. It ensures verification and validity.

“Chain of Custody is the process of verifying the sustainable source. It is transparent and trackable and ensures the products are verified as legal and sustainable. All companies in the supply chain need to be certified to pass the claim on to the end user. If one link is not certified, the chain is lost,” says Simon.

The process for Chain of Custody closely monitors each step of the supply chain, through independent auditing, to ensure that certified, sustainable materials reach the consumer while unsustainable sources are excluded. It means that at every stop along the way, starting with the logs in the forest, through to the final product on the shelves, the timber has been managed sustainably and by people who value the environment.

It's important to note, that not all the timber coming through the verification process, originates from a certified PEFC or FSC forest, up to 30 percent of timber can come from a controlled source. A controlled source has gone through due diligence to ensure it doesn't originate from controversial sources and in many ways still meets the values of PEFC and FSC, these include meeting health and labour requirements, the protection of endangered species, worker's rights, indigenous rights, management of biodiversity and more.

Simon warns that unfortunately there are some Chain of Custody traps and that if you want to promote Chain of Custody, you need to keep an eye out for pitfalls.

“It’s key to make sure the product you have ordered is within the scope of certification. But you also need to be aware of substantiated complaints. Not everyone is honest and occasionally there is fraud involved with certified timber. Companies can go to great efforts to falsify their Chain of Custody so keep an eye on the news and your ear to the ground,” says Simon.

So, how does the design and construction industry aid the Chain of Custody process?

Simon says when you specify or order certified timber, it’s important to verify its legitimacy in the following ways.

“First, you can check the paperwork provided with the delivery. The invoice or delivery note should identify the timbers that are certified. If the delivery information doesn't have the words ‘PEFC or FSC certified’, it hasn't been provided with the formal recognised claim. You can also check the PEFC or FSC database for the supplier's name or their certificate number. This will tell you if they hold Chain of Custody. It will also tell you the products they are certified for. A merchant might sell hundreds of products but are only certified for three or four products, so please check suppliers' details and that they are approved to sell the specific product you ordered. Finally, you should check the labelling. All certified timber will be labelled with the PEFC or FSC label.”

Architectural Designers New Zealand endorses the specification of PEFC and FSC materials and we ask all members to consider how they can better contribute to our world through a greater use of sustainable materials on the job. Specify responsibly sourced timber and make a difference.

We thank IBuilt for partnering with ADNZ to enable Simon Dorries to speak to us and present to ADNZ members. IBuilt are passionate supporters of sustainable timber and have been offering Chain of Custody certification on their products since 2010.

For more information, visit: [Australian Forestry Standard Measures](#) | [Responsible Wood](#)

For more information on IBuilt, visit: <https://nzwoodproducts.co.nz/>