

Frequently Asked Questions – Forest Certification

What is forest certification?

Forest certification provides a mechanism for consumers to choose between products from responsible forestry as opposed to buying products from irresponsible forestry. Since the early 1990's, forest certification systems have grown both in the number of manufacturing participants and in forested acres. Currently, there are more than 90 different certification systems, including the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), worldwide administered by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade associations, and other entities. Each of these certification systems was created to demonstrate that a given forestry operation is meeting a particular set of standards. However, not all of these certification systems were created equal and not all of them require a transparent, multi-stakeholder process.

What's the difference between certified wood and 'regular' wood?

Certified wood originates from forests that are managed to a high environmental standard. Certified and non-certified forests and wood products are subject to the same grading standards and other "quality" attributes. The big difference is that certified wood promotes the "sustainable" management of the world's forests for current and future generations.

What is the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)?

FSC is a non-profit organization that created and administers an international forest management certification program. FSC certified forests are managed for environmental, economic, and social benefits and the program is endorsed by many major environmental groups.

Currently, the FSC program is the only forest certification that is endorsed by all green building programs nationwide.

What is the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)?

SFI program participants practice sustainable forestry on all the lands they manage. They also influence millions of additional acres through the training of loggers and foresters in best management practices and landowner outreach programs.

This unique commitment to sustainable forestry recognizes that all forest landowners, not just SFI program participants, play a critical role in ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of our forests. Currently, SFI certified products are endorsed by some regional NAHB Green Home programs and Green Globes.

What is Chain-of-Custody (COC), and how much is it?

The chain-of-custody refers to the chain of “owners” of a given wood product as it is sold from forest to mill to manufacturer to distributor. An FSC chain-of-custody certificate licenses a company to buy and sell FSC products. To receive a certificate, a company undergoes an audit by an accredited FSC certifier and demonstrates the ability to accurately ‘track’ the FSC products through its operation, and ensure that certified products never get mixed with non-certified products. The cost of a certificate audit varies widely depending on the size of the company, complexity of their process, etc.

Who needs to be FSC Chain-of-Custody (COC) certified?

According to FSC International, any operation making, changing, trading, re-labeling or repackaging FSC-certified products needs to be COC certified in order to use the FSC trademarks and to enable its customers to make an FSC claim about these products.

Why can’t my regular supplier just buy the material from a certified source?

A product is no longer certified, with a few exceptions, once it is bought and sold by an uncertified company. The purpose of the Chain-of-Custody (COC) is to maintain a paper trail from the certified forest to the end-user through the entire supply chain.

Acronyms to remember

Name	Acronym	Description
Forest Stewardship Council	FSC	International forest certification program
Smartwood	SW	accredited certifying body for FSC and rediscovered wood programs
Scientific Certifications Systems	SCS	accredited certifying body for FSC forest management program
Soil Association	SA	accredited certifying body for FSC forest management program
SGS QUALIFOR	SGS	accredited certifying body for FSC forest management program
Sustainable Forestry Initiative	SFI	North American forest certification program
Chain-of-Custody	COC	the chain-of-custody refers to the chain of “owners” of a given wood product as it is sold from forest to mill to manufacturer to distributor.