

Factsheet: Timber Certification

What is timber certification?

Timber certification schemes provide independent, third party verification that timber is sourced from sustainably managed forests. At the international level, two main forest certification schemes exist¹:

- The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – www.fsc.org
- The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) – www.pefc.org

Most sustainable timber procurement policies accept either label as one way of demonstrating compliance with sustainability requirements.

Both the FSC and PEFC CoC certification schemes require compliance with the principles of legality, environmental and social sustainability, including observing the ILO core conventions throughout the supply chain, and protecting the rights of indigenous populations.²

How the process works

There are two elements to timber certification:

- Sustainable forest management (SFM) certification – this addresses the impacts of activities within the country of origin, from forest management to harvest.
- Chain of custody (CoC) certification – this traces products from the forest of origin throughout the supply chain, to the end consumer. This allows companies to confirm the percentage of timber within their products that has been sourced from sustainably managed forests.

What value does timber certification have for procurers?

When purchasing timber, it can be very complicated for public procurers to verify if sustainable management practices are applied at the forest level, especially if the forest is based in another country or geographical region. Independent, third party verified timber certification schemes is the most reliable and straightforward manner of providing such proof.

Implications for procurers

Referring to labels as means of evidence for tender criteria can be of immense help to public purchasers. However, according to the EC Buying Social Guide³, a contracting authority cannot require products to bear a

¹ Since PEFC has endorsed many national systems (ATFS, CSA, MTCS, SFI, MTCC) the certified forest product market is dominated by two schemes: FSC and PEFC.

² Both systems also provide the so called “controlled wood” certification which is an intermediate step between legality and SFM, that guarantees that the wood is not: harvested illegally, in violation of traditional and civil rights, or in forests in which High Conservation Values.

³ European Commission, BUYING SOCIAL: A GUIDE TO TAKING ACCOUNT OF SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT, October 2010

specific ethical trade label/certification, as this would limit access to the contract for products which are not certified but meet similar sustainable trade standards. Hence, contracting authorities (procurers) must also accept any equivalent means of proof that the required standards are met.

If a contractor [supplier, bidder] does not have relevant FSC or PEFC certification, but supplies equivalent evidence, when checking equivalence the procurer may wish to follow the guidance available on the website of the UK central point of expertise for timber procurement (CPET) at www.cpet.org.uk/uk-government-timber-procurementpolicy/evidence-of-compliance/other-evidences-as-assurance/category-b-evidence

Alternatively, in case of reasonable doubt, an external audit could be foreseen as means for assessing compliance with the criteria underlying the sustainable timber requirements. This could take the form of a contracting authority arranging an external audit, which has to be paid for by the contract partner. For this to occur, however, it would be necessary to have plausible information that an infraction had taken place. Similar procedures have been established by some European cities such as Zurich (see, for instance, 'Good practice in socially responsible public procurement – Approaches to verification from across Europe', Landmark partner consortium, 2012)⁴

For more information on the Sustainable Timber Action (STA) project please visit
www.sustainable-timber-action.org



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⁴ 'Good Practice in Socially Responsible Public Procurement – Approaches to verification from across Europe' The Landmark Project (2012) online at: http://www.landmark-project.eu/fileadmin/files/en/latest-achievements/LANDMARK-good_practices_FINAL.pdf [Last visited: March 2013]