

# Sourcing sustainable timber

Wood's low carbon footprint and natural renewability make it the ideal material for more sustainable construction.

And the wood industry is unique in offering third party certification schemes which guarantee the wood has been sourced responsibly from sustainably managed forests. The most well known schemes are operated by the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

## Wood is the sustainable choice

Using more wood from sustainable sources is one of the best ways to help combat climate change. Apart from reducing the carbon footprint of your building and providing a carbon dioxide store, it maximises the carbon sink of the forests by stimulating regrowth, as Europe's forest owners are required by law to replace harvested timber, and it creates a healthy market for wood which encourages investment.

Certified timber is mandatory for UK government projects, and can help achieve higher ratings in the Code for Sustainable Homes.

There are plentiful supplies of certified softwood. Certified hardwood, particularly tropical species, can be more difficult to source. Check with a specialist merchant whether the species you want to use is available with credible certification. Alternative species will be available.



## Sustainable timber

Timber is the most sustainable building product available. It is naturally renewable - over 97% of softwood timber used in the UK comes from Europe, where the forest area is increasing by the equivalent of 90 football pitches every hour of the day and night.\*

For reassurance for softwoods and hardwoods look for certification labels like FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) or PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification).

Always ask your supplier about their responsible purchasing policies.

\*IIED & ECCM, Using Wood to Mitigate Climate Change, 2004 and UNECE-FAO, State of the Europe's Forests, 2011.



This information sheet provides general advice only and is not specific to the requirements of a particular building project. It is the builder's responsibility to check compliance with Building Regulations and standards.



## Sustainable timber: essential for government contracts

The UK government responded to increasing concerns about the origins of timber used in government contracts by adopting a sustainable timber procurement policy.

CPET, the Central Point of Expertise on Timber, set up by the UK government and managed by ProForest, sets government policy for recognition of certification schemes.

See [www.proforest.net/cpet](http://www.proforest.net/cpet)

CPET states that, "UK government policy requires that central departments and government agencies must procure timber and wood derived products from legal and sustainable sources. Although not mandatory, local authorities are encouraged to comply also."

As approximately 40 per cent of UK timber imports is used in public sector contracts, government policy is a major influence on the sector.

The UK government's guidelines on procurement of timber and timber products apply to all public sector contracts. All timber, from perimeter fencing to new scaffolding boards and the products used in the project must be purchased with evidence of legality and sustainability.

## Certification

There are two key elements to certification schemes:

- Firstly, **Forest Certification**. This provides independent third party evidence that the forest of origin is being managed in accordance with the requirements of an accredited forest management standard.
- Secondly, **Chain of Custody Certification**. This enables timber suppliers to provide independent third party evidence of an unbroken path from the forest to the consumer, including all stages of manufacturing, transportation and distribution.

CPET recognizes five certification schemes whose programmes are accepted as proof of legality and / or sustainability.

The 2 most common labels you are likely to see at merchants are:



FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)



PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification)

Certification Schemes	Legal (100% from legal sources)	Sustainable (>70% from sustainable sources)
Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)	All certified products	Products containing 100% certified or recycled raw material
Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)	All certified products	Certified Products containing more than 70% certified raw material
Canadian Standards Association (CSA)	All certified products	Yes
Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)	All certified products	Certified Products containing more than 70% certified raw material
Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC)	Products containing 100% certified raw material	No

## Forest certification

### Legal timber

The organisation that felled the trees and provided the timber from which the wood is derived must have the legal rights to use the forest, have complied with all the relevant local and national laws and codes of practice, and have paid all relevant dues and taxes.

### Sustainable timber

A 'sustainable source' in the context of timber procurement refers to forest management that minimises harm to ecosystems, maintains forest productivity, ensures forest ecosystem health and vitality, and maintains biodiversity, ensuring a balance of social, environmental and economic interests.

### Evidence

Suppliers are required to have evidence of compliance with government contract requirements. Evidence may include timber production under a certified scheme that meets the UK government's requirements or audit statements, government documentation or supplier declaration that meets the UK government's criteria for sustainability and legality.

## Chain of Custody certification

Timber suppliers operating a certified chain of custody system are required to document procedures that meet both the requirements of the scheme and are practical enough to suit the way the company operates. Systems include:

- Procedures to control the procurement, receipt and production and sales of certified material
- Procedures for the identification, collection, storage, maintenance and retention of all relevant records, appropriate to the scale of the operation

Delivery notes, invoices and any accompanying paperwork must identify the product as certified. Ask your supplier for a copy of their certification and registration number if you have any doubts about whether they can offer certified products.

## Verified Progress

Not all wood is certified. It takes a long time and a considerable investment to set up forest certification throughout the world, so it is important to recognize that forests that are not certified can still be sustainably managed. Verified Progress, sometimes called Verified Legal, is an independently audited assurance that timber is legally harvested, and from forests where forest management practices are actively improving towards achieving certification.

## Controlled mixing

Certification schemes allow for some controlled mixing of certified and uncertified wood. However, uncertified material must meet the minimum standards set by the relevant certification body. Certified suppliers may state the percentage of certified raw wood on invoices and delivery notes.

## Are there sufficient supplies of certified timber?

Supply of certified softwood timber exceeds demand. Supply of certified hardwood, and certified hardwood plywood, is more constrained, particularly if it is sourced from tropical forests.

Supplies of certified or Verified Progress hardwood timber will be available from specialist merchants. Ask your supplier about their purchasing policy.





## What this means for you

More and more people recognize the need to use certified timber. In many cases, this is a legal requirement.

For example, if you work as a contractor or subcontractor on public sector work, (such as NHS, National Trust, UK government, armed forces) you must ensure you comply with the procurement requirements when using wood or wood-based products, whether undertaking new build or maintenance work. It includes the wood used temporarily during construction works as well as wood fixed as part of a finished structure. This may also apply to local government contracts.

- If in doubt, ask your customer what he requires and check what is available from your supplier
- Check delivery notes and invoices for details of your supplier's certification and registration number, and for percentages of certified raw timber if relevant, so that you can provide evidence to your client where required
- Look for labelling on the timber that shows it is from a managed source, or certification labels such as FSC and PEFC. Familiarize yourself with the five main labels (see table on p2) so that you know whether they represent legal and sustainable timber or legal timber only
- Keep documentation
- If the material or product you are buying is for public sector work, check your supplier can meet certification requirements.



## Further information and advice

For new homes, using certified timber may contribute to the requirements of the Code for Sustainable Homes or the Ecohomes environmental rating system.

For more information call the CPET Helpline: telephone 01865 243766 or email [cpet@proforest.net](mailto:cpet@proforest.net)

FSC [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

PEFC [www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)

TTF (re Verified Progress) [www.ttf.co.uk](http://www.ttf.co.uk)

Visit [www.woodforgood.com](http://www.woodforgood.com)

Visit [www.trada.co.uk](http://www.trada.co.uk) for [www.bmtrada.co.uk](http://www.bmtrada.co.uk) for additional technical advice if needed..

**Choose and Use** is a series of information sheets for builders produced by TRADA, The Timber Research and Development Association.

They offer up-to-date advice on how to select the right timber and timber products for different applications.

You can often save time and money by choosing the correct timber material or timber products as well as ensuring you comply with current Building Regulations and Building Codes. For more information about specific products visit [www.trada.co.uk](http://www.trada.co.uk) or contact your local supplier.

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