

# Sustainable timber sourcing

The ability to prove that a product is from a legal and sustainable source is now a key factor in the specification of timber and timber products, with consumers increasingly recognising on-product certification labels as an indication that the product has come from a well-managed forest.

Specifiers and buyers are keen to maintain their environmental credentials by specifying the use of responsibly sourced timber and timber products – this is a legal requirement for UK Government procurement contracts.

Third-party certification schemes verify suppliers' claims, enabling them to state that they operate as part of an unbroken 'chain of custody' system from managed forest to certified end product. Displaying the all-important trademarks and logos adds value in an environmentally conscious market.

The most well-known certification schemes in the UK are operated by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®)\* and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). It is important to understand certification scheme criteria and processes, to be confident that certified timber is always used where specified.

This Wood Information Sheet (WIS) is an overview of the subject with signposts to more detailed sources that are listed at the end.

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\* FSC licence A000503



**Figure 1:** The Marks and Spencer store at Cheshire Oaks, near Ellesmere Port, constructed by Simons Group. Only FSC certified wood was used (FSC project licence: TT-PRO-003615:2012)

**Photo:** Simons Group

## Key points

- There are two key elements to timber product certification schemes: forest of origin and chain of custody.
- Suppliers must have their own chain of custody certificate for the product to be counted as certified.
- The two main schemes for chain of custody certification in the UK are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).
- There is no mutual recognition between the FSC and PEFC schemes but a supplier can be certified to both schemes.
- UK timber imports are subject to domestic legislation (EU Timber Regulation and the FLEGT Regulation) implementing existing EU legislation. The UK Government has a sustainable timber procurement policy operated by CPET.
- FSC and PEFC both operate systems to allow for controlled mixing of certified and other wood.
- Certified product claims are subject to continuous review and monitoring by certification schemes.

## Certified timber products

Demand for certified timber products has grown dramatically in the past few years and in some cases it is now a legal requirement. Proof that timber comes from a sustainably managed source is often a key factor in the specification of timber and paper products. Trademarks and logos verifying these claims are becoming more widely used.

Chain of custody certification provides evidence that the product originates from certified, well-managed forests. It also confirms that these products are not mixed with products from uncertified forests at any point in the supply chain, except where controlled mixing takes place under prescribed rules.

Product suppliers need to understand the requirements of the certification process and chain of custody procedures. This improves specification, increases clarity and efficiency throughout the supply chain, and ultimately the customer has confidence that it is receiving what was specified.

There are two key elements to timber product certification schemes:

- **Forest of origin:** this has to be independently certified to verify that it is managed according to the requirements of an accredited sustainable forest management standard.
- **Chain of custody:** a chain of custody system provides independent certification of its unbroken path from the forest to the consumer, including all stages of manufacturing, transportation and distribution.

At no point can the chain be broken. If a company takes legal ownership or physical possession, then it must have its own independently certified chain of custody system to allow it to pass on the sustainable credentials of the product.

Immediate suppliers must have their own chain of custody certificate for the product to be counted as certified. It is not acceptable for the supplier to pass off copies of their supplier's chain of custody certificate as evidence of the supply of certified product. Chain of custody has to be complete right up to the end of the chain.

## Benefits

The benefits of purchasing certified timber products include:

- Achieving the given ratings under the *Code for Sustainable Homes environmental rating system* [1].
- Meeting the UK Government's timber procurement policy (see below).

- Meeting market demands.
- Ensuring that responsible forest management is practised and supported.
- Playing a part in protecting the earth's forests and subsequently the environment.
- Mitigating the impact of the EU Timber Regulation.
- Contributing to BREEAM sustainability performance credentials.

## Certification schemes

There are two main schemes for chain of custody certification in the UK:

- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) [www.fsc-uk.org](http://www.fsc-uk.org)
- Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) [www.pefc.co.uk](http://www.pefc.co.uk)

Both of these are international schemes. Other schemes are nationally based and their certification logos may be seen on imported timber and timber products. Scheme standards are available to download from their respective websites (see Further reading). There is no mutual recognition between the FSC and PEFC schemes.



**Figure 2:** Stocks of certified wood

**Photo:** PEFC

In order to become certified the company starts by creating a quality management system to demonstrate how it will manage traceability and control of certified products from purchase to sale. An accredited certification body, such as BM TRADA Certification ([www.bmtrada.co.uk](http://www.bmtrada.co.uk)), then verifies this system against the appropriate scheme standard(s) and issues a chain of custody certificate to the successful company. An auditor makes routine surveillance visits, usually at least once per year. A full re-assessment is undertaken every five years for both FSC and PEFC schemes.

There are also multi-site and group certification schemes available for larger and smaller companies respectively.

FSC and PEFC also offer project certification, which is the one-off certification of timber products used in a specific project, such as a construction contract. This certification is undertaken by a third-party certification body, such as BM TRADA Certification, and provides independent verification of the type and quantity of certified timber that was used. Examples of these one-off certified projects include FSC certification for the Marks & Spencer store at Cheshire Oaks and dual FSC and PEFC certification for the London 2012 Olympic Park.

Products now readily available under certified schemes include:

- structural timber and timber components (strength graded softwood and hardwoods, trussed rafters)
- engineered wood products (glulam, I-joists, cross-laminated timber etc)
- joinery items (doors, windows, profiled timber)
- sheet materials (chipboard, MDF, OSB, plywood)
- fencing, decking and cladding
- packaging (pallets, packing cases)
- flooring
- furniture and furnishings
- paper products.

## Legislation

The EU Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan has resulted in two pieces of UK legislation:

### EU Timber Regulation (EUTR)

The 2013 *EU Timber Regulation* (EUTR) [2] prohibits placing illegally harvested and produced timber and timber-based products onto the European Union market.

The EUTR sets out a systematic approach with obligations placed on different types of traders. Operators who 'first place' timber products onto EU markets must carry out a 'due diligence' process to minimise the risk of these products being sourced from illegal operations. Others in the supply chain need to ensure that timber products are traceable. EU Member States will impose penalties on those who do not comply.

### The FLEGT Regulation

The FLEGT Regulation has a narrower scope than the EUTR, as it applies only to countries that have entered into a Voluntary

Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the EU and are in possession of a licence to export legally harvested timber. These VPA countries can only import timber to the UK that has been licensed accordingly.

## UK Government Timber Procurement Policy / CPET

The UK Government has adopted a sustainable timber procurement policy in response to increasing concerns about the origins of timber used in government contracts. The policy requires that all timber purchased by central government departments should come from legal and sustainable sources. Local government is also encouraged to comply.

The timber purchased by central government should fall into one of two categories:

- **Category A:** independent certification of the timber and timber products by any of the forest certification schemes that meet the policy requirements (such as the FSC and PEFC schemes).
- **Category B:** alternative documentary evidence that provides assurance that the source is legal and sustainable.

The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) ([www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)) is responsible for the implementation of the policy. The day-to-day management of information related to the policy is contracted to the Central Point of Expertise in Timber (CPET). CPET manages a website ([www.cpet.org.uk](http://www.cpet.org.uk)) that provides detailed information and advice on how public sector buyers and their suppliers can meet the UK Government's timber procurement policy requirements in practice.

Architects, specifiers, contractors and suppliers working for, or on behalf of, government bodies should be familiar with the policy: the policy criteria should normally be included in any government contract. Specifiers may also have to consider the use of certain species if these are not available with certification. This is particularly important if the species is listed in the *Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species* (CITES) [3] appendices at: ([www.cites.org/eng/resources/species.html](http://www.cites.org/eng/resources/species.html)).

It is estimated that approximately 40% of UK timber imports are used in public sector contracts. The Government's policy has been a major driver in sustainable timber procurement. Its influence can be seen across both the public sector as a whole and in the increasing demands of the private sector.

## Specification

If specifying for a government contract under EU procurement legislation, you may not specify an individual certification scheme,

but you can ask for certain criteria to be met. However, in the private sector you may be as specific as you like. Unless use of a particular species is critical, it may also be beneficial to avoid naming the timber species in the specification and just use the technical requirements. Giving more scope to the supplier/contractor improves the chance of certified timber actually being procured. If some of the better known species of timber are not available as certified, using a lesser known species with similar properties may be considered. TRADA Technology can often advise on alternative species (visit [www.tradatechnology.co.uk](http://www.tradatechnology.co.uk)) and has tools available to help you with selection (see for example the TRADA timber species database at [www.trada.co.uk/techinfo/tsg/](http://www.trada.co.uk/techinfo/tsg/))

The purchase order or contract should make it clear that certified timber products are required. The availability of certified timber products and a list of those who can supply them usually can be obtained from the scheme websites, which also have product search pages.

### Chain of custody schemes

Companies operating a certified chain of custody system are required to have procedures that meet the requirements of the scheme, meet the certification body's own criteria and are practical enough to suit the way the company operates. Systems include:

- Procedures to control the procurement, receipt, storage, production and sales of certified material. All staff involved should be adequately trained to show competence in working with these procedures.
- 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. All records relating to the chain of custody system are kept for a minimum of five years.

<p>Description of the goods as certified according to the appropriate 'claim', for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FSC 100%</li> <li>• FSC Mix 70%</li> <li>• FSC Mix Credit</li> <li>• FSC Recycled 100%</li> <li>• 100% PEFC certified</li> <li>• PEFC recycled</li> </ul>	<p>The supplier's chain of custody code. For example:</p> <p><b>TT-COC-123456</b></p> <p>Where TT is the company's certification body (BM TRADA Certification), COC designated chain of custody certification, and 123456 is the company's unique six-digit certification code, issued to it by its certification body.</p>
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**Figure 3:** Certification details included on delivery documents and purchase invoices

A very important part of the control of a company's chain of custody system is monitoring quantities of certified material bought and the quantities of certified products sold. Therefore, records must be kept of:

- Quantities of raw materials purchased from each supplier, plus the total for each type of raw material.
- Conversion ratios calculated for each process, if appropriate.
- Sales details of certified products, including quantities sold to each customer and total quantities sold.



**Figure 4:** PEFC label on processed softwood  
**Photo:** PEFC

### Control systems

All companies operating a chain of custody system are required to identify and use a control system that is appropriate to the type of products they buy and sell and how these will be identified and controlled. The type of control system used will largely depend on whether the company can buy exclusively certified products or will have to mix certified and other material to produce its product.

FSC and PEFC both operate systems to allow for controlled mixing of certified and other wood. These systems are rigorously checked by the certification bodies. Under the current requirements, other material being used must be verified as meeting a rigorous set of sustainability criteria as identified within the respective systems. Both FSC and PEFC have defined three alternative control systems and each uses specific terminology for these systems:

- FSC transfer system/PEFC physical separation method
- percentage systems
- credit methods.

The process and operating requirements of these systems is covered in detail in the BM TRADA Group publication *Chain of custody certification for forest products* [4].

## Product claims

From the specifier's and end user's perspective it is generally enough to know whether or not the product is certified, without going into detail about the claim. This only becomes appropriate if the product is entering another production/manufacturing business. Even so, it is important to ensure that the minimum claims are being met. These levels are subject to continuous review and should be confirmed with the appropriate certification scheme.

Only if the certification body is satisfied that all these areas are being controlled, will they issue a certificate and a unique registration code number. The number is traceable back to the supplier and should appear on all delivery notes and invoices. In some instances, if a supplier is handling both FSC and PEFC material they will be certified to both schemes and will display both registration numbers accordingly.



**Figure 5:** FSC label on logs

**Photo:** FSC Deutschland/Christian Beuter

## Procurement tips

Follow these tips to ensure you are sourcing sustainable timber:

- Always request a copy of your supplier's own chain of custody certificate and check it against the certificate holder's listing on the relevant website.
- DO NOT accept copies of other chain of custody certificates. These are not objective evidence of the supply of certified product.
- Obtain paperwork as proof of receipt of certified products.
- Check that delivery notes and invoices identify certified goods (both certified and uncertified goods can be on the same invoice) and show the supplier's chain of custody code number.
- Check that the scope of your supplier's certification covers the product range you are receiving.
- Be aware that not all products will be labelled, although the trend for goods to carry the various logos is likely to continue to increase.

## References

1. Code for Sustainable Homes at [www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/code\\_for\\_sust\\_homes.pdf](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/code_for_sust_homes.pdf)
2. The 2013 EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) (Regulation (EU) No. 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20th October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market)
3. CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) at [www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)
4. Chain of custody certification for forest products, BM TRADA Group, 2013

## Further reading

Canadian Standards Association (CSA) at [www.csa.ca](http://www.csa.ca)  
Choose and use: Sourcing sustainable timber, TRADA Technology, 2012  
Construction Briefing, EU Timber Regulations: A Summary of Requirements and Implications, TRADA, 2012  
Central Point of Expertise in Timber (CPET) [www.cpet.org.uk](http://www.cpet.org.uk)  
FIRA International at [www.askfira.co.uk](http://www.askfira.co.uk)  
Greenpeace at [www.greenpeace.org.uk](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk)  
Livesey, K. and Hughes, D., Responsible sourcing of materials in construction, BRE, 2013  
Malaysian Timber Certification Council at [www.mtcc.com.my](http://www.mtcc.com.my)  
Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) (USA) at [www.aboutsfi.org](http://www.aboutsfi.org)  
Timber Trade Federation (TTF) at [www.ttf.co.uk](http://www.ttf.co.uk)  
TRADA Technology at [www.tradatechnology.co.uk](http://www.tradatechnology.co.uk)  
Wood for Good at [www.woodforgood.com](http://www.woodforgood.com)  
WWF-UK at [www.wwf.org.uk](http://www.wwf.org.uk)

### About TRADA

The Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA) is an internationally recognised centre of excellence on the specification and use of timber and wood products.

TRADA is a company limited by guarantee and not-for-profit membership-based organisation. TRADA's origins go back over 75 years and its name is synonymous with independence and authority. Its position in the industry is unique with a diverse membership encompassing companies and individuals from around the world and across the entire wood supply chain, from producers, merchants and manufacturers, to architects, engineers and end users.

### Our aim

To provide members with the highest quality information on timber and wood products to enable them to maximise the benefits that timber can provide.

### What we do

We seek to achieve this aim through active and on-going programmes of information and research. Information is provided through our website, an extensive collection of printed materials and our training courses.

Research is largely driven by the desire to update and improve our information so that it continues to meet our members' needs in the future.

While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the advice given, the company cannot accept liability for loss or damage arising from the use of the information supplied.

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