

What is Sustainable Forestry Certification?

Many people would think that natural wood is a green product. For the most part, they would be correct. By today's standards, however, unless a product is certified as coming from a sustainable forest, it may not be very green at all.

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Traditional forestry practices often destroy and upset the natural balance of our woodlands. "Managed" forests often become monocultures where just one tree species is planted, like a Southern Yellow Pine that grows quickly. In these "managed forests" or tree farms, extensive use of herbicides and pesticides actually kill off other species of trees that try to grow in the forest. This does not provide the varied natural habitat needed for other plant, insect, and animal species to grow and survive.

Logging these forests often means many roads, large machinery, and clear-cuts that result in extensive land erosion and sedimentation run-off that pollute our rivers and streams. If you visit a logging area and find a place where two streams or rivers meet, you will see a very distinct difference in the color of the water running down from the logging area as opposed to the one coming from a natural area. Once the muddy waters of the logging run-off meet and join the clean stream, those

waters are now both polluted and will carry their pollution downstream for miles, affecting everything else they meet. This pollution will most likely end up in a watershed area and ultimately into a water supply.

Clear cutting, a process in which all trees of a forest are cut down at the same time, has already destroyed entire species of plants, animals, and insects. This is especially evident in the rain forests and other forests of undeveloped countries where we may have already lost plant species that could have cured various diseases. The roads and machines used in clear-cutting practices often destroy the natural forests and surrounding environments for generations to come. In some cases, the destruction is permanent.

In sustainable forestry practices, all trees indigenous to the area are allowed to grow. Only select trees are cut, leaving behind many other trees vital to the health and continued growth of the forest. Different trees are

cut down at different times and at different ages to mimic the natural ebb and flow of the forest and the creatures that make their home there.

Through a joint effort to influence a change to more responsible forestry practices, a number of groups joined together to establish sustainable forestry standards, practices, and certifications. Forest certification is the process of evaluating forests or woodlands to determine if they are being managed according to this agreed set of standards and practices. Companies and organizations that have successfully completed an audit, by an independent and accredited certification body, can claim a sustainable forestry certification. Certification audits are usually arduous, on the ground assessments, conducted by highly qualified and objective individuals.

Any "green" or "sustainable" wood product, whether it is for building lumber, furniture, paper, and package goods, etc., receives a certification stamp to ensure

customers that the wood products they are using come from companies that truly use sustainable forestry practices. To be sure you are purchasing products that come from sustainable certified forests, look for the FSC logo, Forest Stewardship Council, or the SFI logo, Sustainable Forestry Initiative.



Wood bearing either of these logos has gone through a certification process called "Chain of Custody" in which the wood product can be tracked from the forests, through the harvesting, processing, manufacturing, warehousing, transportation, and distribution to the store and to the consumer.

To learn more about how these sustainable forestry certification organizations visit their websites at www.fsc.org and www.about-sfi.org. There are a few other similar sustainable forest certification programs out there; however, most industry leaders recognize FCS and SFI as the most exacting.

By looking for and trying to buy only wood products that bear an accredited certification label, such as the FSC or SFI logos, you will be doing your part to Live Better and Live Green.

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