

AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FOREST CERTIFICATION AND GREEN BUILDING STANDARDS IN THE U.S. HARDWOOD INDUSTRY

Omar A. Espinoza
Assistant Professor
University of Minnesota
espinoza@umn.edu

Urs Buehlmann
Associate Professor
Wood Science and Forest Products
Virginia Tech

Robert Smith
Associate Dean and Professor
Wood Science and Forest Products
Virginia Tech

Background and Objectives

The environmental, or "green," movement started in the 1960s out of concerns about energy independence and environmental sustainability. International agencies have been created to promote the responsible utilization of resources. Businesses are making efforts to include environmental issues in their corporate culture, motivated not only by regulation but also by consumers' demand for environmental performance. Two developments in particular affect how companies in the U.S. hardwood industry sector do business: the increasing adoption of green building standards in the construction industry, and the growing demand for hardwood products with forest certification. The objectives of this study were (1) to assess the level of awareness of forest certification and green building standards among hardwood lumber producers, and (2) learn about the industry's perceptions about the environmental movement.

Methodology

The Center for Forest Products Business at Virginia Tech conducted a nationwide mail survey in 2009. The target population were US hardwood lumber manufacturers. A total of 1,216 companies were sent a nine-item questionnaire, with questions ranging from familiarity with forest certification and green building programs, to financial benefits from certification. After accounting for closed mills, undeliverable addresses, duplicates, and companies not in the lumber manufacturing business, the adjusted response rate was 13.9%.

Familiarity with Green Standards

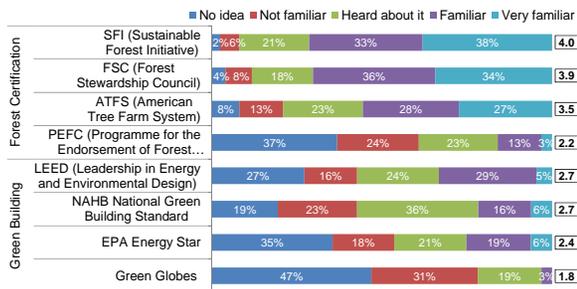


Figure 1. Familiarity of respondents with forest certification and green building programs (percent of respondents). In boxes average response (1=no idea, 5=very familiar)

Extent of Certification

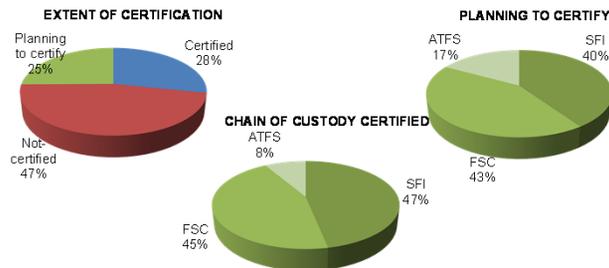


Figure 2. Extent of chain of custody certification programs.

Benefits from Certification

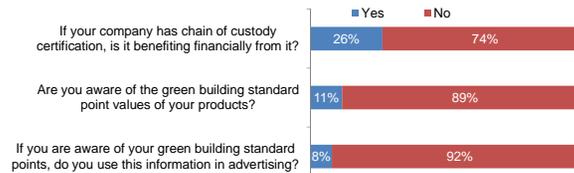


Figure 3. Benefits from environmental programs (percent of respondents).

Demand for "Green" Products

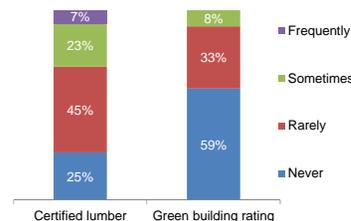


Figure 4. Frequency of customers' requests for green material (percent of respondents).

Perceptions About Green Movement

Table 1. Agreement with environmental-related statements.

Statement	Agreement with statement (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree)
Demand for lumber to be used in green buildings will increase in the future	4.3
Our firm is pursuing environmentally conscious policies	4.2
Customers are increasingly concerned about the environment	3.9
Our firm has reduced its environmental footprint during the last 3 years	3.8
Green building standards are a fad and will go away	3.3
Green building standards will help the hardwood lumber industry	3.0
We have had one or more energy audits during the past 3 years	2.5
Certified lumber allows higher profit margins	2.1

Table 2. Answer to open question "What do you think the industry should do to obtain the maximum benefit from the green building and forest certification?"

Comments about the environmental movement.
"Certification is very expensive"
"Consolidate the certification process, promote National Standards that are designed for the small landowner"
"I don't see any benefits from Green Certification"
"More promotion about the fact that hardwoods are green and sustainable regardless of certification label"
"Promote the fact that ours is a renewable resource"
"We need a standard organization like NHLA that will certify all timber and lumber to members"
"Work on making the rules "user friendly" to the forest industry and less complicated"
"Make the certification program affordable"
"Going green is a hoax"

Summary

Although green building standards are poised to become an important driver for certified lumber, awareness of green building programs was relatively low among respondents at the time of this survey. Respondents are more familiar with forest certification systems than with green building standards. Almost 30% of respondents reported holding some type of COC. Only 26% of the respondents that held a COC certification at the time of the study reported having benefited financially from it. Respondents agreed that demand for environmentally-certified material will grow in the future, and the industry should educate the public about the environmental advantages of hardwoods.

Participating Institutions

- USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station, Princeton, WV
- Wood Education and Resource Center
- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
- Center for Forest Products Business