

LEED Acceptance of SFI Now Pending

Could SFI products finally achieve LEED credits?

Anyone who has followed the torturous path of Sustainable Forestry Initiative's (SFI) quest to be accepted by the LEED standard—knocking out the monopoly long held by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)—may have noticed some interesting recent developments. I just attended the SFI conference, where I sat down for an interview with SFI's Jason Metnick, senior director, market access and product labeling, and he explained the reason for a recent flurry of emails that started going out to the press back in June.

As background to the recent developments: USGBC has been allowing comment on a proposal called "Pilot Credit 43." With the opportunity for comment on Pilot Credit 43, USGBC has potentially opened the door for granting LEED credit to SFI-certified products for non-structural wood items, such as furniture, flooring, and windows.

I know that the SFI-FSC debate sounds like "inside baseball," with regulatory authorities arguing over minutia, but the fact is, billions of dollars in wood and wood fiber sales are at stake in the acceptance of SFI (and other wood standards) within LEED in addition to FSC. Although LEED doesn't have a foothold among residential structures, it is the dominant green building standard, by far, among commercial structures, and it's getting only stronger. Under the current LEED rating system, 51% of the wood and wood fiber purchase must be purchased from FSC-certified sources for contractors to get the MR7 point...

and that's a huge pain to lumber dealers who supply the job. The FSC "chain of custody" certification is onerous for lumberyards to obtain/maintain, and the FSC inventory can't be co-mingled with non-FSC-certified products.

Moreover, it's been widely acknowledged that FSC has held the monopoly on the LEED credits for wood and wood fiber products as a form of punishment to SFI, which is subject to the enduring misperception that it's a front organization for irresponsible foresting practices...something that couldn't be further from the truth. (I've been to the last two SFI conventions—and followed the organization for years—and I would urge doubters to check out SFI. It really is a solid and balanced organization, run by very decent people with a clear sense of their sustainability mission.) If Pilot Credit 43 goes through and SFI products are accepted into the LEED standard, SFI clearly views this as precedent-setting and, maybe, a "nose under the tent" for wider acceptance of a full range of SFI products down the line.

The allowance for public comment on Pilot Credit 43 by USGBC is actually a little unusual, because as recently as December 2010, there was a proposed rewrite of LEED's certified wood policy put to a vote, and acceptance of SFI was shot down. But look at the numbers of that vote: 965 people opted in to vote, and only 521 actually voted. Of those, 286 people (54%) voted to maintain FSC's monopoly. (Read the full BuildingGreen.com story on the vote at <http://bit.ly/p6yH5X>.) So, the fate of 190 million acres in SFI-certified forest was

decided by 286 people? Does any industry observer besides me think this is grossly unfair?

"In the absence of acceptance of Pilot Credit 43, USGBC took two steps back with the *responsible sourcing of raw materials* section of the revised LEED 2012," said SFI's Jason Metnick. "It looks as though USGBC will get rid of the MR7 point [the LEED section where wood and wood fiber are currently credited], yet USGBC maintains that the only way to get a wood or wood fiber credit is to be 100% FSC pure. There are much less strict requirements on non-wood products—like those that are mined, quarried, bio-based, steel, or concrete—to get a credit. At SFI, we just don't think it's good for North American forests, and we continue to call for full LEED acceptance of SFI wood and wood-forest products, including paper."

Stay tuned, because SFI is obviously determined to remain watchful of the LEED wood and wood fiber certification process to ensure that its standard finally gets its due. ■



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