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Discover Sustainable Lumber

The Forest Stewardship Council is working to create sustainable forests worldwide. More environmentally friendly than average timber, FSC-certified lumber can help builders put more green in their projects and in their pockets.

By Matt Alderton


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Driving through the Pacific Northwest, famous for its thriving forests, you will notice that not all wood is created equal. Some forests are healthy and thick, filled with active wildlife, clean water and towering trees. Others are barren, lifeless and filled only with stumps and scraps, veritable graveyards for mistreated timber. The difference is stark.

Stephen Aiguier, a builder based in Portland, Ore., often drives through both kinds of forests. He says one just feels different from the other.

"Here in Oregon, there's certainly a divide between responsibly harvested, grown and managed forests and massive clear cuts," Aiguier says. "Pretty much every Oregonian can see the difference just driving around."

Those same Oregonians are part of an ever-growing number of people also wanting to prevent those clear cuts by using green lumber for their homes. Collectively, they're transforming popular green building trends into an enduring green building industry with a call for environmentally friendly homes that is growing and more vehement by the day.

Builders such as Aiguier are answering that call. His company, Green Hammer Inc., adopted green building trends early. When he founded it in 2002, Aiguier wanted to create a company known as much for its environmental awareness as it is for home building. He committed himself to promoting recycling, clean air, energy efficiency and local supply chains within each of his projects. What's more, he committed himself to protecting forests by using wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in all of his homes, a decision that has earned him not only environmental accolades but also a booming bottom line.

A Gold Standard for Green Lumber

A group of global stakeholders who set out to develop environmental and social standards for the forestry industry founded the FSC in 1993. Responding to international concerns about illegal logging, endangered species and environmental issues, such as erosion and air quality, they joined forces in order to promote responsible stewardship of the world's forests by certifying products that are made with sustainable [lumber](#).

In the past 14 years, they've been successful in doing just that. More than 225 million acres of forests in more than 70 countries have been certified according to FSC standards, providing FSC-certified wood for thousands of products worldwide since 1993.

FSC certification puts forests under many environmental and social standards. "It's about total forest system management," says Katie J. Miller, communications director for the FSC U.S. initiative, FSC-US. In other words, FSC certification tells you that the wood was harvested legally and comes from a sustainable forest where wildlife is protected and the environment is monitored.

Although FSC sets standards, it does not enforce them. Instead, independent inspectors are charged with certifying forests and, at virtually every level within the supply chain, the products that come from them.

"Much like customers might look for [appliances with the Energy Star label](#), they're beginning to look for wood products in their homes that have the FSC label on them," Miller says. "It's a third-party certification label that basically allows consumers to vote in the marketplace with their dollars to show that they're interested in wood and paper products that come from good forests."

Solutions and Opportunities

FSC-certified wood is not only good for the environment, but it is also good for builders. With so many ecologically aware customers, the demand for environmental solutions has grown.

Just ask Aiguier. Because he uses only locally grown FSC-certified lumber in his projects—including Douglas fir for framing, oak and maple for [flooring](#), Hem fir for trim and cedar for siding—his services are in high demand among green-conscious homeowners. In fact, his services are in such high demand that his business has averaged 250 percent annual growth in the past five years.

"[FSC-certified wood] costs more, and it isn't as simple to deal with," Aiguier says. "But that little bit of commitment for me has done everything for my business. The building market isn't doing very well right now, and yet we're bursting at the seams. And that has a lot to do with how we've used FSC lumber to set ourselves apart in the green building market."

Sustainable lumber can help you grow your business, too. It can:

- **Give you a competitive edge.** "Green' is a huge buzz word these days," Miller says. "The FSC label gives builders a way to differentiate themselves in the marketplace."
- **Help you market your business.** Not only is green building a sound branding strategy, but it is also newsworthy and can give builders opportunities to reach out to local media in order to publicize their environmental efforts.
- **Increase your profits.** Because it tends to be slightly more expensive and harder to obtain, FSC-certified lumber can give builders a legitimate reason to charge higher prices. What's more, because green builders are hard to come by, eco-conscious consumers often are willing to pay more for their services.
- **Help you deliver a superior customer experience.** "The nice thing about FSC is they have a chain of custody," Aiguier says. "You can track down where your wood comes from, so we're able to tell our clients, 'All your siding came from this forest and your floors came from this other forest.' And because we buy locally, they can go and visit that forest and walk around. It gives them a good story to tell."
- **Earn you endorsements.** Because a third party certifies it, FSC lumber receives an implicit expert endorsement. Now, thanks to a new project-level certification launched by the FSC last year, builders can receive the same endorsement by getting their individual projects FSC certified.

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