

Certified Wood and You

Given that half the world's forests are now gone, and less than 8 percent of what's left are protected in any way, it's clear that we can all benefit from reducing our use of wood. Using less wood in our projects, recycling as much as possible, and using more recycled wood products or even engineered products are obvious green choices. When we must use wood, choosing certified wood products is the best way to support the timber industry's transition to a more sustainable way of doing business. Globally, the building industry is the second largest user of wood products, behind the paper industry. Consider the following figures from the [Worldwatch Institute](#) and the [Natural Resources Defense Council \(NRDC\)](#) which illustrate the magnitude of the building industry on our environment.

Building construction consumes 25% of the virgin wood used globally each year.

Americans use 27% of wood harvested worldwide, although only 5% of the world's population lives in the U.S. Each U.S. citizen consumes the equivalent of one ancient tree every year.

It takes an acre of forest to build a 1,700 square foot frame house.

Just over 16% of the wood delivered to a construction site is never used.

Construction of an average U.S. home can send 7 tons of debris to the dump. Along with demolition activity, 90 million tons of rubble goes into U.S. landfills annually.

Efficient framing can reduce wood use by nearly 20% when building a new home.

The NRDC also offers an excellent [online handbook for Efficient Wood Use in Residential Construction](#).

Certification

The bottom line is that we are losing over 30 million acres of forest across the world each year. Much of the harvest goes to support our building industry. After reducing our use of wood, reducing our waste, recycling, and using recycled wood or wood substitute products, our next step is to buy certified wood. Wood is certified through the [Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#), an independent, non-profit agency that accredits nine different certifying groups. In the U.S., the [Rainforest Alliance's Smartwood program](#) and Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) are approved as certifiers. The [Silva Forest Foundation](#), [SGS Forestry Qualifor Programme](#) and SKAL are among those certified in Europe and Canada. The nine accredited agencies audit and certify forest lands that are judged to be well managed according to the principles and criteria of the international FSC. They also issue annual chain-of-custody certifications to wholesalers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers who handle certified wood products from forest to market. Currently, over 466 forest management certificates in 56 countries have been issued through FSC agencies. These certificates represent over 76.8 million acres of certified forest land worldwide.

Before a product may carry a FSC label, all stages of the production, distribution, and sale of the product must be independently certified. Wood must be tracked from the certified forest to the finished product to ensure the validity of the claim. To become certified, a business must maintain adequate inventory control systems to allow for separation and identification of certified products.

Local Choices

A local Austin distributor, Austin Hardwoods, carries certified wood from the [Roy O. Martin Lumber Company](#) in Louisiana. They stock several hardwoods and can special order others. They also special order large volumes of oriented strand board (OSB). Although they carry FSC certified lumber products, Austin Hardwoods is not an FSC certified distributor. Because the wood products are not labeled as FSC certified before they get to the distributor, it is extremely difficult to track the wood through the entire chain-of-custody documentation. When the distributor is not certified, the chain-of-custody is broken. Unfortunately, without this documentation, points can't be earned toward a Green Building Program rating or for [LEED certification](#). However, consumer demand is an effective way to change the market, and consequently, the industry. When shopping at any wood distributor, urge them to become FSC certified.

Resources:

Austin Hardwoods

2119 Goodrich Ave.
Austin, TX 78704
Phone: 512-442-4001
Fax: 512-441-6444
E-Mail: aushdwd@aol.com

FSC Certified Distributors in Central Texas

[Triple Crown Building Products](#)

3419 E. Commerce
San Antonio, TX 78220
Phone: 210-225-3711
Fax: 210-472-0268
E-Mail: lauterstein@triplecrowndoors.com

[Amex International](#)

PO Box 701725
San Antonio, TX 78270
Phone: 210-496-7807
Fax: 210-496-6074
E-Mail: bapelton@broomcorn.com

[Steves & Sons, Inc.](#)

203 Humble Ave.
San Antonio, TX 78225
Phone: 210-924-5111
Fax: 210-924-0470
E-Mail: wendyg@stevesdoors.com

Other Texas distributors of certified wood can be found by using the [Forest Certification Resource Center search engine](#).

From the Ratings...

Using data collected through our residential rating form, the Green Building Program has come up with some interesting numbers about what GBP members are doing, or not doing, on their sustainable building projects. We analyzed data collected between 1998 - 2002 on a total of 2126 homes inside the Austin Energy service area.

For example, of all the rated homes included in the analysis:

- 97% use double pane windows
- 90% use finger-jointed, engineered, MDF, recycled or local species wood for trim packages
- 88% donated excess materials to [Habitat for Humanity](#) or re-used them in other projects
- 82% are using integrated design teams that include the designer, builder and mechanical contractor
- 82% of the homes have light colored exterior walls
- 79% have built-in recycling centers
- 76% have their supply system air flow tested by a qualified technician
- 74% are built with continuous ridge and soffit vents, or the attic space is within the thermal envelope
- 65% have a minimum of three light fixtures installed with compact or tube fluorescent bulbs
- 41% use an easily accessed electronic or pleated-media filter
- 32% of the homes are within a 10 minute walk of public transportation
- 29% have formaldehyde-free insulation
- 17% have a front porch
- 11% have metal or tile roofs; a little over half of these homes are production built
- 2% of homes have backyard compost bins
- 15 homes have an operable thermal chimney, cupolas, or something similar for stack effect ventilation
- 8 homes have rainwater catchment systems

Solar Use

Solar use is still low with only 1% of the homes being designed with passive solar heating in mind. Statistics for some of the other solar options listed in the rating system are:

- 4 custom built homes have solar domestic hot water or swimming pool heating systems
- 2 homes using photovoltaics of any type (excluding garden/pathway lighting)

GBP Says Goodbye and Thanks to Intern Amanda Gayle

After nine months as the Green Building Program's intern, Amanda Gayle is saying her goodbyes. She joined the group during the summer of 2002, after her third year at UT. Her studies in Architectural Engineering, including coursework in environmental impacts and controls, and an interest in how the built environment affects occupant health and safety, prepared her for the important role she played in the program. Through her efforts, the residential group gained a valuable database tool to help in tracking rated projects. In fact, this month's newsletter has an article based on her data analysis.

Among other efforts, Amanda conducted research on the cleaning chemicals used in most commercial and residential buildings. Her research covered the chemicals' impacts on building occupants and maintenance personnel. She also developed suggestions for minimizing overuse of harsh chemicals.

Amanda has decided to focus on school this semester in order to be able to spend six months working with the American YouthWorks Casa Verde Builders beginning this summer. She plans to graduate from UT in May 2004. As she progresses down her own path, we wish her the very best and we know she will play a role in improving the built and living environments around her.

Member Bulletin Board

Green By Design

Get your clients on board! Let them know that our next Green By Design Workshop will be March 29, 2003.

HotOn Austin Spots Continue

Through March and April, look for commercials from the Green Building Program to air during the HotOn Austin show, Sundays at 10:30 am, on channel 24 (KVUE). The show is aimed at residential realtors and prospective home buyers.

Is Your Green Home a Ham?

Former GBP staff Jill Mayfield occasionally does location scouting for photographers who shoot ads and catalogues. She is developing a list of interesting, unique, sustainably built homes to be used for this purpose. There is usually a fee paid to the owner of the property, plus extra photos

are usually available to the builder/architect. If you or one of your clients are interested in having your green home photographed, contact Jill directly via e-mail (jillmm@austin.rr.com) or phone 512-339-0474.