



Climate Change and Green Buildings: The Forest Products Industry Perspective

Policy makers at the federal and state level are seeking to reduce the environmental effects of building construction and use through legislation and regulation. AF&PA, the national trade association of the U.S. forest products industry, appreciates these efforts and encourages them to recognize that wood products are among the most "green" of all building materials. Wood is a renewable resource that sequesters huge amounts of carbon – both in forests and in products – and provides high levels of energy efficiency. However, the benefits of wood products are not always fully recognized in some "green building" rating systems. The industry believes that legislation mandating and promoting the construction of green buildings should recognize all credible rating systems.

- **The environmental impact of buildings is significant.** The construction and operation of residential and commercial buildings accounts for nearly 40 % of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the U.S.
- **The use of wood building materials can help mitigate the climate change impact of building construction.** Recently, the Consortium for Research on Renewable Industrial Materials (CORRIM), a non-profit research consortium, undertook a study evaluating the energy and environmental impact of leading building materials. The study concluded that the use of wood-framing in buildings resulted in the generation of 26% fewer CO₂ emissions than for comparable steel-frame buildings, and 31% fewer than for concrete-frame buildings. Also, the study found that manufacturing wood framing used at least 16% less energy than producing steel or concrete frames.
- **The ability of wood products to store carbon is recognized internationally by climate scientists and policymakers, including the most recent guidelines from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.** Nearly one-third of carbon sequestered in trees remains sequestered in wood products for the remainder of their useful life, which in the case of some products (such as building materials) can be decades or centuries. According to EPA estimates, wood and paper products produced each year store the equivalent of 100 million tons of carbon dioxide. This is equivalent to eliminating the carbon dioxide emissions from 18 million passenger cars - 13% of all passenger cars on the road in the U.S.
- **However, one particular green building rating system does not recognize the environmental benefits of wood products appropriately.** The U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) rating system does not provide appropriate recognition for the use of renewable wood products. Through several of its specific credits, the LEED system puts U.S. wood products at a significant disadvantage to competing (and environmentally inferior) building materials.
- **Legislation has been introduced in Congress and state legislatures aimed at mitigating the climate change consequences of buildings.** Green building legislation should not be exclusive to the LEED rating system because LEED does not adequately recognize the energy saving and environmental benefits of wood products. Legislation promoting green buildings should recognize other rating systems, such as *Green Globes*, that take a more balanced approach to building materials, or be neutral in its recognition of rating systems.

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