

# Choosing timber windows – can we afford not to?



A BWF Timber Window Accreditation Scheme Fact Card on

## SUSTAINABILITY

### What does 'sustainability' mean?

Sustainability is "Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." [World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future]

Sustainability comprises three areas of concern: society's well-being, economic life and the environment (the 'Triple Bottom Line' [TBL]). "Society depends on the economy – and the economy depends on the global ecosystem, whose health represents the ultimate bottom line". [www.sustainability.com]

### Why is it important?

Sustainability is integral to the continual development of any industry. It is also of great political importance having been the main emphasis of the recent Earth Summit and the Kyoto Agreement. The change in the global climate is ever-more apparent and it is now universally accepted that something has to be done in order to preserve, and improve, the ecological, social and economic environment in which we live.

As 9.85 million window frames are installed in UK houses each year, at a value of £2,320 million\*, the production, manufacture and disposal of windows can have a great effect on the environment. Different materials are deemed to have different environmental credentials. [\* Source: Palmer Market Research, 2002]

Greenpeace, in their 1997 Briefing No. 1, Installing New Windows (entitled, 'LOOK OUT. Your choice of window frames could seriously affect the health of our planet.'), stated: "As long as timber is sourced from properly managed forests and care is taken in the choice of preservatives, paints and stains, timber windows are by far the best environmental choice."

Timber is the most sustainable material for windows. The financial costs of timber windows are equal to other materials: the environmental 'cost' is negligible. They benefit both society and the environment because modern, high quality, fully factory finished and factory glazed timber windows perform just as well – if not better – than the best made from other materials.

Including:

- What does 'sustainability' mean?
- Why is it important?
- What is available?
- What's in it for you?
- What you can do
- What the future holds

## What is available?

"...in Europe, there are more trees than there were a century ago. And the number is growing - with an annual surplus of growth over harvest of some 252million cubic metres\*- roughly 30 times the total UK annual consumption of timber!" [www.woodforgood.com, \*Source: UN-ECE FAO TBFRA 2000]

Sustainable forests are not simply those which are replenished as they are harvested. They are also managed to ensure that the ecology of the forest is not damaged in putting the natural products to an economic use.

There are now several environmental management systems, which provide an independent evaluation of the way in which a forest is managed and the timber is processed and distributed. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Pan European Forest Certification (PEFC) Council operate certification schemes specifically for forestry. Other systems, such as the Eco Management and Audit System (EMAS) and ISO / EN ISO 14001, assess environmental management regardless of sector.

So, even though timber has repeatedly been proven to be the most sustainable material for windows, this is only true if the timber used is sourced from a properly managed and independently certified forest.

Scandinavian and European softwoods certified by FSC, PEFC and other similar certification schemes are now widely available. Between both schemes there are over 76 million hectares of certified forests worldwide (as at January 2003).

The use of products manufactured using sustainable timber will:

- Ensure that you are not damaging the world's forests and that this truly renewable resource will continue.
- Reduce the damaging chemicals that are released into the atmosphere due to production and disposal of other window frame materials.
- Enable you to service an increasing demand and differentiate you from those who do not.
- Demonstrate environmental, social and economic responsibility on your part, not least through a willingness to work with all the stakeholders in timber production, distribution and manufacture.
- Help fulfil corporate social responsibility policies.
- Aid delivery of Local Agenda 21 strategies.
- Provide added value to the overall project.

It is important, when specifying timber windows, that you request timber that can be proven to have come from a sustainably-managed forest, preferably by means of certification such as FSC and PEFC. An ability to prove the chain of custody back to the source forest using independently-verified certificates or documentation may become a necessity as market demands increase.

Make sure you receive copies of the certificates or other documentation showing the chain of custody from the forest to your premises, and stating that the timber is from independently certified sustainable sources or, if the country of origin has not adopted these systems, as a bare minimum, that the manufacturer has environmental systems such as ISO or EMAS in place. Ensuring that your suppliers provide you with the correct documentation will safeguard your own reputation.

Ideally, you should become accredited as part of the chain of custody yourself. This may not be as expensive as it first appears, as lower-cost group and multi-site options are now increasingly available.

The sustainability issue will not disappear. In fact, it is likely to grow and be incorporated into more and more regulations.

"Government departments have been required since 1990 to operate procurement policies that take into account the environmental impacts of their purchasing decisions while achieving value for money. This means looking beyond the initial price to take account of whole life costs, quality and other benefits..." [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk]

The use of timber from sustainable sources will not be a means of differentiating from your competitors in the future: it will be the way to keep up with them.

Timber from sustainable sources will become more widely available, making it easier to produce, specify and use products made from such materials.

BWF Accredited Timber Window Manufacturers have pledged that, by the end of 2004, they will only use timber sourced from FSC, PEFC, or equivalent certified sustainable sources.

## Sustainable timber: what's in it for you?

## What you can do

## What the future holds

Contact BWF Accredited Manufacturers for windows that are already manufactured using sustainable timber.

[www.bwf.org.uk](http://www.bwf.org.uk)



**British Woodworking Federation**  
55 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL  
Tel: 0870 458 6939 Fax: 0870 458 6949  
e-mail: [windows@bwf.org.uk](mailto:windows@bwf.org.uk) [www.bwf.org.uk](http://www.bwf.org.uk)

