



What is FSC?

By Siddharth Patel, Oceanic General Trading



We've barely gotten used to the acronyms associated with the internet age, and a new set arrive on our doorstep. In this new era, the acronyms relate to sustainable design. One such three-letter word is FSC or, in its full form, Forest Stewardship Council. Using another, more familiar acronym, FAQ, this article is an attempt to raise awareness of FSC.

Dubai's Oceanic General Trading is the first FSC approved timber supplier in the UAE and wider region, and we have encountered many questions, and some misconceptions, since we became FSC certified. We hope that this piece will assist you in achieving a part of your sustainable design goals with FSC timber products. Our certification number is SCS-COC-002133, which must be mentioned as per FSC requirements.

So, what is the FSC?

The objective of the FSC is to promote environmentally-responsible, socially-beneficial and economically-viable forest management worldwide. This is achieved by the members, represented by forest owners, timber industries, social groups and environmental organisations in the form of international, non-governmental NGOs. FSC is unique in its decision making process, as a balance is struck between economic, ecological or societal interests.

What is responsible forest management?

FSC's vision for responsible forest management is healthy forests providing an equitable sharing of benefits from their use, while respecting natural forest processes, biodiversity and harmony amongst their inhabitants. All FSC certified forests worldwide are evaluated

against FSC's ten principles and 57 criteria for responsible forest management.

Who supports FSC?

FSC, when initiated, allowed not only commercial benefactors, but the likes of NGOs, including WWF, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace.

How is FSC certification done?

FSC certification on forests is carried out by independent 3rd party certifiers, which are commissioned by forest owners. This is what makes the FSC system unique and ensures that a forest is well-managed, from the protection of indigenous people's rights to the methods of felling trees.

What is chain of custody?

Another associated three-letter acronym is COC, or Chain of Custody. COC is the process by which the source of a timber product is verified. In order for products originating from certified sources to be eligible to carry the FSC trademark, the timber has to be tracked from the forest, through all steps of the production process, until it reaches the end user. Only when this tracking has been independently verified is the product eligible to carry the FSC logo.

Are FSC products more expensive?

FSC products can sometimes be marginally more expensive. At times, companies have saved money by using FSC, as they have operated in a more efficient manner. If price differences occur, these are mainly caused by illegal and/or unsustainable logging. Higher prices for FSC timber typically occur in competition with forest operations where more

trees than permitted or ecologically acceptable are cut down, taxes are evaded, indigenous people's rights are ignored, and workers are underpaid and their safety neglected.

What FSC products are available?

A wide variety of products are now available that are sourced from FSC forests. These include the likes of timber flooring, MDF, particleboard, fire retardant and non-fire door core, plywood and structural timber. A wide variety of products are available globally, so general contractors can utilise FSC for in-situ concreting, and interior designers can use MDF, veneers and door cores to achieve their sustainable design goals.

What to look for?

As a designer, you should look out for the FSC COC number on requesting information on product availability (usually in the format of XXX-COC-#####). They should be able to send you a scan of their FSC COC certificate. When receiving the materials, they must include the COC number on their invoice, and mention clearly which products in the shipment are FSC. Do not accept any alternatives to this, as this is a criteria set by FSC standards.

Do timber distributors need FSC COC?

Yes, as they take legal ownership of the product (even if they do not take physical ownership), they must be within the chain of custody. If the distributor does not have COC certification, then they can not resell the product as FSC certified.

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