



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



UNECE/FAO

TIMBER COMMITTEE WEEK

NEWS BRIEF

The Green Life of Wood

Assessing its Environmental Impacts from Cradle to Cradle

15 October 2012, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

On 15 October 2012, nearly 100 participants, representing almost 30 different countries attended the workshop the 'Green Life of Wood - Assessing its Environmental Impacts from Cradle to Cradle', at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The workshop opened this year's Timber Committee session which will focus on 'Sustainable products and their contribution to a green economy'.



Sustainable forest products qualify as durable and recyclable. Wood is also a renewable material. Harvested wood products store carbon, and forests have a crucial role in carbon sequestration and in replacing fossil fuels, concrete and steel, which have higher carbon emissions. This stresses the role of forest products in fighting climate change. While informed opinion on forestry and environmental matters acknowledges the role of wood as a “green material” and a vital factor in the fight to mitigate the effects of climate change, it has yet to truly gain that image with the general public, most policymakers and the construction industry; tending instead to maintain its traditional role. The image we need to cast off is that of wood as a ‘traditional’ material, with no relevance to modern technologies, circumstances and concerns. Innovation, policies and changing the public and investor perception of forest products were among the many challenges discussed during the workshop.

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Heikki Granholm, Director at Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland opened the workshop and stressed that the meeting was a great opportunity for experts to evaluate the potential of LCA in helping to promote the credentials of wood as a green competitive material.

Michel de Galbert, General Engineer, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forests noted the need to strike an effective and workable balance between forest carbon conservation and the production of woody biomass.



David Paré, Research Scientist, Natural Resources Canada, highlighted the controversy over the mitigation potential of bioenergy and presented options to promote wood energy as a climate friendly and cost-effective solution.

Nicolas Mainville, Director for Greenpeace Quebec, Forest Campaigner, Greenpeace Canada, explained that with growing demand of wood energy in Europe, Canada and the US have become the main players in exporting wood for power in Europe, mostly as wood pellets. He stressed that the rapid shift towards using trees for electricity production is directly or indirectly increasing pressure on ecosystems.

Alfred W. Kammerhofer, Head of Section, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), highlighted that cascaded use of wood plays an important role in the context of energy scarcity and climate change mitigation, as it maximises savings in primary resources use.

Tarja Häkkinen, Senior Principal Scientist, Technical Research Centre of Finland (VTT), presented the outcomes of a study which assessed the impact of wood on the greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) of buildings. Results show that increasing the use of wood in new constructions would lower annual GHGs emissions caused by building materials.





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Sylvain Labbé, CEO of Quebec Wood Export Bureau focused on the role of material use in green building, explaining how efficiency increases the importance of embodied energy in a green buildings time frame. He also stressed the need to include LCA in all green building policies.

João Ferreira, Secretary General, European Cork Federation, noted that cork products and the cork sector have benefited from new economic paradigms and a green economy that promotes globally sustainable consumption and production. He added that LCA has proved to be a fundamental tool to demonstrate the environmental advantages of using cork over other materials.

Rupert Oliver, Sustainability Consultant, American Hardwood Export Council, highlighted the importance of innovative technologies and adapted tools in communicating LCA data. He stressed LCA data can become an integral part of communication strategy in the forest sector, through regular use in architectural project case studies, wood product design competitions, media advertisements, and linkage to technical species guides.



Contact speakers

Michel De Galbert
David Paré
Alfred Kammerhofer
Nicolas Mainville
Tarja Häkkinen
Sylvain Labbé
Rupert Oliver
João Ferreira

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Main Meeting conclusions

- **Life cycle assessment (LCA) is a comprehensive environmental accounting tool to evaluate overall environmental impact of a material or product throughout its life from cradle-to-grave, as well as from cradle-to-cradle.**
- **LCA procedures and methods are governed by established rules and standards e.g. developed by ISO. However, further methodological development and information sharing is required.**
- **There is currently sufficient evidence through LCA and other tools (e.g. forest data, certification, etc.) proving the environmental performance of wood and other forest-based products.**
- **LCA provides a basis for making informed decisions along the whole value chain (from policy to production and consumption), thus improving resource efficiency.**
- **The forest sector has not yet made full use of LCA in its work, including communication.**

All presentations are available on our website at, <http://www.unece.org/forests/lca-workshop.html>

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