



Part 3 Controlled Wood and Fiber Sourced Wood

by Jeff Stringer

A significant percentage of certified wood products are sold with a mixed label, meaning that not all of the wood in the product is wood from a certified forest. Part 2 of this series discussed how the mixed label system works. An important aspect of the mixed label is the criteria for the uncertified wood that goes into these products. Part 3 of this series explains what these criteria are and how companies obtain the non-certified wood that meets these criteria.

Mixed label wood products are manufactured using both certified and uncertified wood. However, not just any uncertified wood can be used to produce a mixed label product. In the case of the Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI), wood that is designated as meeting the fiber sourcing standard must be used.¹ For Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), “controlled wood” must be used.¹ These terms controlled wood and fiber sourcing are specific to FSC and SFI. They are two distinct systems, but the idea behind controlled wood and fiber sourced wood is similar. In simple terms it means that the uncertified wood that is used to produce a mixed label product must come from an area (state or region) where forest and land use practices meet the controlled wood and fiber sourcing standards for FSC and SFI, respectively.

help ensure that their state meets the objectives. This effort includes helping foster logger and landowner education, facilitate the use of forestry best management practices to protect water quality, promote forest management among landowners, conserve special areas, and a host of other related issued.

SFI certificate holders producing a mixed label product must obtain wood that is from an area meeting the fiber sourcing standard. These certificate holders also must ensure that they avoid stolen or controversial sources of wood. SFI industries are independently audited to ensure that they are meeting these standards and that the wood they are procuring is coming from the areas that are designated as meeting the fiber sourcing standards. It is common for the majority of important timber states to meet fiber sourcing standards and therefore a significant percentage of the wood harvested in the U.S. is considered fiber sourced.

FSC’s controlled wood system works in a similar geographic manner. In this case FSC has a set of controlled wood standards that a region, normally the area that an industry is procuring wood from (this could be multiple states), meets the controlled wood standards. If it is found to meet these standards then the wood procured from this area is termed controlled wood and it can be used to make an FSC mixed label product. For an area to meet the controlled wood standard it must be evaluated to see if there is a low probability that wood coming from that area violates the controlled wood standards (currently 5). Examples include there being a low probability of illegally harvested wood, wood from genetically modified trees, or wood coming from harvesting where the degradation of special sites such as old growth would wind up in FSC mixed

label products. The controlled wood standard also aims to avoid wood coming from areas where violations of traditional and civil rights are common or there is an overall loss of forest area in the region. As is the case with SFI industries, industries with FSC chain of custody certificates get independently audited to make sure that the controlled wood designation for an area is correct and all wood they are claiming comes from a controlled wood designated area is coming from that area. They also avoid any sources of wood that is known to not meet FSC standards. Similar to SFI’s fiber sourcing



Photos courtesy: Jeff Stringer

This paper carton has a Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Certified Sourcing label indicating that all of the fiber that was used to manufacture the carton was procured from a state or region meeting the SFI’s Fiber Sourcing standards or was recycled.

¹ Recycled fiber can also be used in both SFI or FSC mixed products.

Sources of Wood in Labelled Product

100% from a state/region meeting SFI Fiber Sourcing Standards or is recycled fiber.

At least 70% is, or represents wood from, American Tree Farm System or SFI certified forests. The remainder is from a state/region meeting Fiber Sourcing Standards or is recycled fiber.

At least 70% is, or represents wood from, FSC Certified Forest. The remainder from a region meeting Controlled Wood Standards or is recycled fiber.

100% of the fiber (wood) in the product came from an FSC certified forest.

Common Certified End Product Labels



wood to an industry that is making an FSC mixed label product. SFI is different in this regards. Like FSC, SFI industries can buy and sell fiber sourced wood. However, unlike FSC, SFI companies can market a product that indicates that it is composed of fiber sourced material. These products carry a SFI Certified Sourcing label. The certified sourced label on a product means that the wood that was used to make the product came from a state (or region) that is meeting the SFI fiber sourcing standards. Independent auditing assures this. It is very common to see the SFI certified sourcing label on products as there is a large portion of the U.S. that meets the fiber sourcing standard (as discussed above) and thus a large volume of wood is available that can carry the Certified Sourcing label. This label means that the wood in the product, although not necessarily coming from a certified forest, is coming from a region

of the country where SFI deems that good forest practices are being fostered and good forest management is occurring. As indicated above FSC does not have a label for a controlled wood product.

The important point in the case of both SFI and FSC is that they can say they know where their wood is coming from and that area meets their fiber sourcing or controlled wood standards. This issue is not trivial. Wood is sold and moved internation-

ally and in some instances there can be significant amounts of illegally logged wood and wood that comes from countries where little is being done to protect the environment and take care

This paper drinking cup has a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Mix label indicating that at least 70 percent of paper content represents wood from an FSC certified forest with the remainder comprised of FSC Controlled Wood or recycled paper.

Photo courtesy: Jeff Stringer

of social ills. The fiber sourcing and controlled wood systems help ensure that these sources of wood do not enter SFI or FSC labeled products. Also the controlled wood and fiber sourced wood systems were designed to indicate that wood going into a product with an FSC or SFI label meets certain broad standards of sustainability. Ultimately the standards help ensure the integrity of the FSC or SFI mixed label.

About the Author:

Jeff Stringer, Ph.D., is an extension professor at the University of Kentucky and is responsible for continuing education and research in hardwood silviculture and forest operations. He is also an editor of the Kentucky Woodlands Magazine. The authors thanks those providing peer review of this article.

Cooperative Extension Service, Department of Forestry, University of Kentucky, 201 Thomas Poe Cooper Building, Lexington, KY 40546-0073; Phone: 859.257.5994; Fax: 859.323.1031; E-mail: stringer@uky.edu

system, a large portion of the U.S. meets FSC's controlled wood standard. In both instances these programs and designations are going on without landowners knowing about it since it does not directly deal with individual forests but rather a designation for an entire region.

There is no final wood product labelled as FSC controlled wood. It is simply wood that is used to make an FSC mixed label product. It can be bought and sold, meaning an FSC certified industry that procures controlled wood can sell this wood or fiber as controlled