



Wood First Leads the Discussion for Environmental Construction Benefits

January 11, 2013 - With the increasing shift towards environmental impact mitigation in the construction sector, it makes sense that building materials be compared. To suggest, as was done at the January 10th, 2013 Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee meeting, that the low carbon footprint of wood building materials is “pulp fiction” flies in the face of facts that can easily be verified using tools such as those from the Athena Sustainable Materials Institute.

The versatility of wood products for applications from bridges to buildings is also well known.

The HRM Standing Committee meeting unsurprisingly also received commentary that questioned the role of policy makers to pick ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ in the economy. There are, of course, many precedents for this and one such example is the adoption of LEED certification – itself a ‘beyond Building Code’ preference. In over 200 Canadian communities, Wood First is also a preference that shows:

- An understanding of the importance of reducing the environmental impacts of construction (i.e. renewability, carbon sequestration capacity and low-embodied energy).
- Support for the many communities and jobs dependent on the forestry industry.
- An interest in supporting innovation within construction.

“To suggest that Wood First disregards safety is false,” explains Michael Giroux, President of the Canadian Wood Council. “Regardless of the material used, the resulting building must meet Building Code or else it does not get built.”

The opposition from competing materials should reassure everyone that the wood industry is doing something right - after all, would concern be raised for a material that was of no threat - particularly from an environmental perspective?

Wood is more than just an alternative construction material - it is a renewable and responsible choice for all stakeholders. Whether entitled ‘Wood First’ or ‘Environment First’, the purpose is to reach a policy that will lead to reduced environmental impacts.

The Canadian Wood Council prides itself on issuing statements and facts that are backed by research and technical expertise, recognizing that ultimately there are pros and cons and a place in construction for all building materials.

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The Canadian Wood Council (www.cwcc.ca) is a national technical association representing manufacturers of Canadian wood products used in construction. CWC is a strong advocate for the use of life-cycle assessment and communication about the environmental attributes through the use of Environmental Product Declarations.