



News Article

Carbon Sequestration in Hardwood Flooring

Wood Harvesting Concerns Could Harm the Flooring Industry

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St. Louis, MO – April 14, 2010 -- There is a misguided belief in Europe that harvesting trees harms the environment. We need to recognize that this could negatively impact the hardwood flooring industry and take action. This is a concern I came away with last month when I moderated the third annual International Wood Flooring Summit held during DOMOTEX asia CHINAFLOOR in Shanghai. At that unique gathering of international government and flooring association leaders we discussed legislation and issues that impact the global wood flooring industry.

The President of the European Federation of Parquet Importers, Mr. Jürgen Früchtenicht, presented on Europe's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) legislation, the EU's variation of the U.S. Lacey Act Amendments. He said that part of the current environmental thinking in Germany and other parts of the EU is that *hardwood flooring "is a waste of natural resources and should be avoided."* Früchtenicht doesn't believe that himself, but his report made it clear that this is a real concern gaining momentum. I was shocked so I set out to discover what was behind this premise.

What I found is a longstanding, complex debate over whether all sequestered carbon in a tree is "released" when it is harvested or is "transferred" when the wood from the tree is made into durable goods. It turns out that the Kyoto assumption first articulated in 1997 says that: ***"all carbon removed in wood and other biomass from forests is oxidized in the year of removal."*** In other words, the pundits involved with the Kyoto Accord said that all of the carbon sequestered by a tree is turned back into the environment when it is harvested. That same assumption was discussed at the recent Copenhagen Accord and is probably the origin of the thinking in Germany that cutting down a tree for flooring is a waste of a natural resource, even though it is known that the opposite is true.

As trees grow they absorb carbon dioxide. They release the oxygen into the environment and sequester the carbon. Up to half of a tree's dry weight is carbon. When timber is transformed into durable products, like flooring, the carbon remains in the wood and is transferred to the flooring which becomes a long-term carbon storage container for the life of the floor.

Früchtenicht pointed out that while the Green Party movement in Europe receives only 10% of most EU votes the environmental movement is endorsed by almost everyone in Europe. If a prejudice against

harvesting wood continues to be supported by the Green Party the risk is high that it will expand and ultimately harm the global flooring industry.

The wood flooring industry cannot afford to allow our consumers to adopt the Kyoto era assumption or be uninformed of the complete story of carbon transfer. Wood flooring manufacturers must educate consumers about environmental benefits of wood flooring's carbon sequestration. Simply stated, wood flooring is an environmentally positive choice. Those flooring manufacturers who can tell the story of harvesting from managed forests to create beautiful carbon storage containers for use in the home have a golden opportunity, and a duty to educate our consumers on this and other topics.

Neither the Lacey Act nor FLEGT target sustainability but rather focus on "illegal logging". Since that is defined by the country in which timber is harvested, Früchtenicht pointed out that although wood may be legal it may not mean that sustainable practices were used in the forest. Managing forests is an integral part of maximizing carbon sequestration since mature trees absorb less carbon than faster growing, younger trees. Harvesting old trees and planting new trees is an essential part of a sustained sequestration process. Transforming stored carbon from a standing forest into wood flooring at the optimum time assures the maximum amount of carbon will be sequestered and creates a more beautiful home.

Many experts recognize that carbon is transferred to durable goods and are working to have this recognized in international protocols but the process is complex and political. You can read more about this in "Recognition of Carbon Storage in Harvested Wood Products: A Post – Copenhagen Update," February 25, 2010 at <http://www.dovetailinc.org/files/DovetailHWP0210.pdf>

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