

# SGEC's Effort for Japan's Wood Procurement Policies to Promote Countermeasures against Illegal Logging

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## Abstract

The Sustainable Green Ecosystem Council (SGEC) was established in 2003 with the participation of Japan's forestry and related industries, environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), citizen's groups, etc. The SGEC's certification system is unique to Japan in that it integrates a forestry certification and a chain of custody, or CoC, (separation and labelling) certification. Over 330,000 hectares of forest have been thus certified, and the system has received widespread support. SGEC-certified wood has a certification of legality and sustainability, and meets the criteria of green procurement. SGEC is thought to contribute to Japan's wood procurement policies to reinforce its countermeasures against illegal logging.

Keywords: SGEC, Sustainable Green Ecosystem Certification, forest certification/separation and labelling certification, green procurement

## 1. Japan's Forestry Management and Green Procurement of Wood

The objectives of Japan's forest management are fulfilment of multi-faceted functions of forests as stated in the Basic Law for Forest and Forestry, and sustainable and healthy development of the forestry industry. Its forest management implementation is based on the forest operation planning system as specified in the Forest Law.

The national government develops its basic plan for forest and forestry, and based on it, local governments develop their forest plans and forest enhancement plans. A forest owner/operator, singularly or jointly with others, voluntarily develops a five-year forest operation plan and submits it to their city/town/village mayor for approval. The nation's forest operation planning system is implemented in the hopes that forest operation is rational and systematic based on the plan.

By introducing the Green Purchasing Law, the Japanese government implemented its measures to give wood and wood products, of which the legality and sustainability are verified, priority when the government procures materials. The said law also specifies the details of verification, including the definition of legality and sustainability and products/materials in scope. The government also has developed guidelines of proving the legality of wood and wood products in scope of government procurement. These guidelines, based on the Green Purchasing Law, encourage extensive efforts by the industries and private companies in this regard.

## 2. The Relationship between Japan's Guidelines and the SGEC Certificate

The government's guidelines for proving the legality explain the method for forest operator to prove it independently, and the method to prove it through a forest certification mark. SGEC(Sustainable Green Ecosystem Council) is listed as one of the certification bodies.

Japan's effort for forest certification was trailing behind that of other nations, but the entry of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) into Japan triggered the movement within the forestry and related industries to establish a certification system suitable for Japan. Various NGOs and citizens' groups joined forces, and after many discussions, SGEC was founded on June 3,

2003. Its activities started immediately. SGEC believes that forests must be positioned as a crucial element of a future recycling-based society. To that effect, SGEC aims to raise the level of the nation's forestry management and establish a system where the whole society recognizes and uses wood and wood products that are certified to have come from forests managed and operated in a sustainable manner.

SGEC's judgment criteria of sustainable forest management uses the above-mentioned Japan's forest operation planning system and incorporates Montreal Process, other standards/indicators, ISO, and other environmental management systems. These are applied, where appropriate, to the actual state of forest management in Japan, so that the certification system will withstand international scrutiny. The criteria specify the following seven standards and 36 indicators, and provide guidelines to serve as the basis of a certification checklist.

- 1) Standard 1 Identification of forests in scope of certification and establishment of their management policies
- 2) Standard 2 Conservation of biodiversity
- 3) Standard 3 Conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources
- 4) Standard 4 Maintenance of productivity and health of forest ecosystems
- 5) Standard 5 Legal and institutional framework for sustainable forest management
- 6) Standard 6 Maintenance and promotion of societal and economic benefits
- 7) Standard 7 Monitoring and disclosure of information

The SGEC certification includes in its scope not only a forest certification but also a chain of custody (CoC) certification of the separation and labelling of products harvested from certified forests. More specifically, logs from certified forests are separated from non-certified logs and wood, and after trading of the logs/wood, only those businesses from supplier side (manufacturers of timbers, laminated lumber, pulp and paper) to user side (builders, residential home manufacturers, etc.) that are certified for its separation and labelling practices may handle the logs/wood. The integration of a forest certification system and a forestry product certification system is the unique attribute of the SGEC system.

Based on the above-mentioned standards/indicators and guidelines, each certification body creates its own guidelines and checklist to perform their certification audits. The final audit is performed by the SGEC Auditing Committee to ensure the uniformity and reliability between and of various certification bodies.

After an audit and judgment by the certification body and a further audit by the SGEC Auditing Committee, the SGEC Head Office issues the certificate. The certification body has the obligation to conduct annual surveillance audit after the issuance of the certificate.

SGEC believes that the certificate, issued after a third-party audit based on the forest operation planning system of the Japanese government and internationally-recognized sustainable forest management methods, attests to the legality and sustainability of the forest managed/operated by the certified party.

Legality means that the wood/log was harvested legally in light of the forest-related legislations of the nation in question, and in the case of Japan, such legislations include its Forest Law and many other related laws and regulations. SGEC forest certification enables verification of legality through a forest certification audit report, documentation that is kept safe at the SGEC Secretariat. Sustainability means that the wood/log was harvested from a forest that is managed and operated in a sustainable manner, and the certification enables verification of sustainability through a forest certification audit report, documentation that is kept safe at the SGEC Secretariat. The legality and sustainability are ensured through publication of the contents of audits and the annual surveillance audits.

Wood/logs harvested from SGEC-certified forests are separated and labelled throughout their processing and trading. Reliability is ensured through publication of the contents of audits and the annual surveillance audits.

### **3. Future Tasks and Perspectives**

The SGEC certification system was established only recently, and its lack of international recognition has been criticized. We recognize that it is an issue to overcome. To that end, we will increase our efforts in exchanging information with the bodies of other internationally-recognized certification systems, and actively seek recognition from bodies operating international certification standards.

Since the establishment of SGEC in June 2003, the SGEC-certified forest area has expanded to 330,000 hectares. This attests to the interest in the use of domestically produced wood in this country and the trust that is given to the legality and sustainability of SGEC-certified wood/logs.

We expect that the movement of green wood/log procurement will further pick up its momentum in Japan, and hope to contribute to it actively.