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SEPTEMBER 2009 \$5 U.S. / \$7 CANADA

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Mountain Lumber, Boone, N.C. and F.D. Sterritt Lumber of Watertown, Mass. on the Business of Green Building



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PVC: A GREEN BUILDING PRODUCT?
A Prudent Analysis of Product Alternatives Shows Plastic Might be the True Green Alternative

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Mailbox READER LETTERS

The Green Reality of Sawn Lumber

I'm writing in response to "Green Aisle by Aisle," July/August LBM Journal.

Mr. Wagner, what, exactly, do you mean by green? If your talking points about thermal envelope, low toxicity, sustainable harvesting and high performance in products define green, then sawn lumber is the epicenter of green building materials, and engineered wood is not far behind.

In your article you said, "Cement board siding takes a great deal of energy to manufacture, finish and ship, but once it's in place, wow, you have a low-maintenance, durable product that's very green in a lifecycle analysis." This reply is not meant to be a contest between lumber and cement siding—but it is meant to be a contest of myths in "green" products versus the green reality of sawn lumber. How did you come to your "lifecycle" conclusion? Have you ever seen a carbon absorption report at a cement plant? How does cement siding fare in R value, moisture retention, weight, cost and installation flexibility against similar lumber products? The fiber backbone of American building materials, meaning sawn Pine, Spruce and Fir, have a very green answer. Sawn lumber, by world environmental best-practices, by Silviculture and harvesting practices, by carbon footprint and absorption, by insulation value, by value to the end user and by durability, is tops in every sense of logical green thinking.

There's a myth in building materials that reads like this: "Lumber must be certified to be green, while the other energy-intensive and environmentally challenging raw materials get a free pass." Here's a quote from a team of scientists led by Dr. Jim Bowyer, a well-regarded forest products expert: "There are no requirements or incentives of any kind that a purveyor of steel, aluminum, concrete, plastic, glass, bamboo, or any material other than wood demonstrate environmental and social responsibility in management or resource extraction, despite the fact that substantial en-

vironmental and social impacts are associated with production of all of these materials."

Many green advocates consulting with our industry are simply echoing the fad, not real value. Example: The certification of lumber may look green, but the flow of green (money) will be from your customer to the pockets of the certifiers, and nothing much else happened. The real green of American timber was already there.

— Dennis Allen, President, Klumb Lumber
Fairhope, Alabama
(Thanks to Mark Junkins/McShan Lumber
and Buddy Klumb/Klumb Lumber for
their input.)

Lifecycle Analysis Points to Vinyl Siding

I am in total agreement with John Wagner that life-cycle analysis is an important consideration when selecting green building products "Green Aisle by Aisle," July/August LBM Journal. However, the way the term was applied to cement board siding (i.e. fiber cement) was contradictory.

Full lifecycle analysis takes into account all stages—from raw material acquisition to manufacture, transportation, installation, use and waste management. Certainly fiber cement is durable, but it is misleading to say, as indicated in the article, that fiber cement is "very green in lifecycle analysis," directly following the statement that it takes a "great deal of energy to manufacture, finish and ship."

The Vinyl Siding Institute, Inc. (VSI) is committed to providing accurate data to the building industry. VSI turned to a third-party, green consulting expert—Tad Radzinski, P.E., LEED AP, founder of Sustainable Solutions Corporation—to conduct a review of available data related to exterior cladding. This research included a lifecycle analysis conducted using the Building for Environmental and Economic Sustainability (BEES) software, a tool developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). It is established per ISO14040 and ASTM standards and recognized by green building professionals as a useful tool for selecting environmentally preferable products.

BEES analysis shows that vinyl siding performs well on tough environmental measures

through all lifecycle stages, outperforming other exterior cladding options. I am curious as to what data fiber cement bases its lifecycle analysis claims on. VSI welcomes the opportunity to compare the full lifecycle analysis of vinyl siding and fiber cement. For more information about the green attributes of vinyl siding, including BEES lifecycle analysis, visit www.vinylsiding.org/greenpaper. In addition, I am happy to answer any questions about the life-cycle analysis of vinyl siding: jhuntley@vinylsiding.org.

— Jery Y. Huntley, President
Vinyl Siding Institute, Inc., Washington, D.C.

John D. Wagner responds: Lifecycle analysis tries to create an apples-to-apples comparison (difficult as that is) so that we can compare dissimilar products, such as wood, cementitious, and vinyl. But engaging in a life cycle debate doesn't mean we are trying to select one product at the exclusion of others. With 120 million residential structures in the U.S., many of which use cement, wood, and plastic, there is surely room for all three categories of product to be used in applications where they make the most sense. I would not spec wood siding in a seaside setting in termite country; instead, vinyl or cement makes sense there. But I would spec it in many other settings. It's what my house is entirely made from here in New England. By citing lifecycle analysis, I am simply calling attention to all the energy required to harvest/mine, manufacturer/mill, ship, install, treat, and potentially replace a product. I am not picking winners. That said, wood cannot rule out vinyl and cementitious as ungreen simply because wood is a natural product. There's room for all types of cementitious, vinyl, and wood products, each has its green quality, and its own ideal application.

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