

LEED standard harmful to Oregon woodworkers

(Editor's Note: This article was submitted by Machinists District W24, based in Gladstone, Oregon.)

As the market for wood products evolves, government regulations should not penalize the businesses and employees in the timber industry who tirelessly work to make high-quality, environmentally sustainable forest products. Unfortunately, that is the consequence of local, state and federal policies that exclude Oregon timber from building projects across America.

The contributions of Oregon's timber to the state and national economy cannot be underestimated. The numbers tell the story: Oregon tops the nation in softwood lumber and plywood panel production, and its wood processing industries generate over \$10 billion in annual sales while employing 75,000 workers. In all, forestry helps support 140,000 jobs in Oregon. This is a testament to the quality and skill level of the businesses and employees who harvest, process, and sell our timber to customers in Oregon and the United States.

The businesses and workers who produce these goods make time-consuming investments that will hopefully pay off when they can market their products in a number of venues — be it

for a government contract or for growing consumer demand. Many Oregon businesses choose forest certification as a method of ensuring their credibility as the producer of an environmentally sustainable finished product.

Regretfully, hundreds of cities nationwide adhere to the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) "LEED" standards, which only recognize one form of forest certification — the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) — as deserving of its sourcing credits for sustainability. Businesses that use certification programs such as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) (both more widely used in Oregon than FSC) can find it nearly impossible to receive these credits and, therefore, get left out of thousands of public and private projects nationwide.

This stagnates potential job growth for Oregon woodworkers. Their customer base extends beyond Oregon borders, into every other state. Absent any changes that accommodate a majority of certified timber harvested in America, the proliferation of LEED projects nationwide will increase economic losses each year.

FSC is a German-based program that recognizes 90 percent of its forests

outside the U.S. The USGBC allows for timber procured in Russia and Indonesia to get recognized as "green" or "sustainable," but blocks a majority of Oregon and American timber from receiving this same designation. Common sense would tell you this inverts the reality of the quality of wood from these nations. In fact, FSC acknowledges that it holds different countries to different standards when it comes to meeting benchmarks for its certification.

Furthermore, FSC lacks the labor protections of SFI, which well exceed U.S. legal requirements. Union members have served on SFI's board of directors for years, and help set standard processes for certification. SFI's worker rights subcommittee constantly interacts with woodworkers and businesses in the timber industry to identify any issues before they arise.

FSC does not provide forest workers these same leadership opportunities.

Regulations that increase the cost of doing business and make it more difficult for woodworkers to market and sell their products deserve to be repealed. Our woodworkers deserve policies that promote a level playing field and do not discriminate against American timber.

OPEN FORUM



Robert Keys, with his young family in the background, said that after working as a part-time carrier without benefits in Portland for the last seven years, he is taking a 25 percent pay cut in order to get benefits. "I brought my family for you to see what you're fighting for. This is the beginning of our journey as postal carriers," he said.

...Rally to save Postal Service

(From Page 1)

Richard Nixon called out the military and the National Guard in an attempt to distribute the mail and break the strike. Postal workers eventually won increases in pay and were guaranteed collective bargaining rights.

Today, union officials say a group of lawmakers working on behalf of corporate interests want to undermine the USPS, bust the unions, then privatize the agency and start selling off some of its prime downtown real estate. USPS owns real estate in virtually every city and state, worth a reported \$105 billion.

"The privatization of the Postal Service is symptomatic of what's wrong with this nation," Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, told rally-goers. "It's a nation that puts capital gain over people gain. Think about it. This is about profit. This is about greed. This is about costs on your backs, because you're going to pay more if this happens."

Mail centers in Pendleton, Bend will close this year

Mail processing centers in Bend and Pendleton, Ore., and in Pasco, Wash., were notified March 26 that they will shut down by the end of the year.

The closures are expected to eliminate 40 jobs in Bend and 47 jobs in Pasco. Union officials are uncertain how many jobs will be lost in Pendleton. Workers are represented by the American Postal Workers Union and the Mailhandlers Union, a division of the Laborers.

In May 2012, the Postal Service said it would close 140 processing centers across the country — 71 starting in 2014. It has accelerated the start dates and is now planning to consolidate 53 mail processing centers this year.

Mail that is now sorted in Bend and Pendleton will go to Portland for processing. Pasco's mail handling will move to Spokane.

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Labor secretary nominee Perez gets thumbs up from AFL-CIO

WASHINGTON, D.C. — AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka says working men and women will be well served by President Obama's nomination of Tom Perez to lead the U.S. Department of Labor.

On March 18, Obama named Perez to succeed Hilda Solis in the Labor Department's top job. Solis left on Jan. 5.

Perez currently is head of the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. From 2006 to 2009, he served as secretary of labor for the state of Maryland. Prior to that he was elected the first Hispanic member of the Montgomery County Council.

Trumka said that throughout his career, Perez has fought to level the playing field and create opportunities for working people.

"At a time when our politics tilts so

heavily toward corporations and the very wealthy, our country needs leaders like Tom Perez to champion the cause of ordinary working people. And working families need and deserve a strong advocate as their secretary of labor — one who will vigorously enforce job safety standards, wage laws, and anti-discrimination rules, and who will speak out forcefully for working families and their workplace rights, including their right to join together to improve their lives and working conditions."

Perez is the son of Dominican immigrants and a lawyer who helped pay his way through Harvard Law School by working as a garbage collector.

President Obama has asked the Senate to confirm his nominee "as quickly as possible."