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Buying Certified Timber

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Buying certified timber is an important step you can take to verify the legality of your supply chains, and it will make it easier for you to obtain the necessary information about the origin of your timber products. It will also help your customer to assess and mitigate risk.





The FLEGT Programme: VPA and EUTR

The Vietnam-EU Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) is a legally binding bilateral trade agreement that aims to improve forest governance and promote trade in legal timber from Vietnam to the EU. With that, domestic materials of your business sources will be evaluated to meet Vietnamese legality requirements. Besides, as a large portion of materials processed in Vietnam originates from other countries, the legality of these materials will also be assessed to make sure no illegal harvested timber can enter the supply chain in Vietnam.

More specifically, the Vietnamese Timber Legality Assurance System - VNTLAS (stipulated in Decree no. 102/2020/ND-CP) requires timber importers to conduct due diligence to ensure that imported timber has been legally harvested, produced and exported in accordance with the legislation in the country of harvest.

Under the same EU Action Plan, known as Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT), European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR) prohibits the placing of illegally harvested timber on the European market in an effort to tackle the problem of illegal logging across the world. It sets out requirements that companies within the European Union (EU) must meet to minimise the risk of illegal timber being traded. Specifically, the Regulation requires companies placing timber or timber products on the European market (both imported and domestic) to implement a Due Diligence System (DDS) minimize the risk of putting such illegal wood products on the market. A DDS includes three elements to minimise the risk that timber products come from illegal harvesting:

- 1. Access to information**
- 2. Risk assessment**
- 3. Risk mitigation.**

? What is certified timber?


Forest certification is a system of inspecting and tracking timber, paper, pulp and other forest products to make sure they've been harvested according to a strict set of guidelines. It's about more than just which trees are cut down. Forest certification is also about the well-being of workers and local communities.

Certification begins in the forest and continues through the entire timber trading chain to the sales outlet. The aim is to provide the consumer confidence that you're buying a responsibly-harvested forest product.

Certification is designed to provide an independent assessment of the

management of forests against well-defined standards. Timber certification may also include two main components: certification of sustainability of forest management; and chain of custody. Certification of forest management covers forest management practices like planning, harvesting, environmental issues, workers' rights, health and safety, as well as the rights of communities and indigenous people's rights to forest resources. Chain of custody certification is then used to trace the wood through the different stages of processing and transport until the final product is sold to the consumer.





€ Should I buy certified timber?

Although both the **VPA** and **EUTR** do not include an automatic “green lane” for certified products, they do recognize the value of certification as a tool for risk assessment and mitigation. The European Commission explains that companies “**may rate credibly certified products as having negligible risk of being illegal, i.e. suitable for placing on the market with no further risk mitigation measures, provided that the rest of the information gathered and the replies to the risk assessment questions do not contradict such a conclusion**”.

If I buy certified, what do I still need to do?

Even where you are able to buy and provide your customer with certified timber, the requirements on due diligence are still applicable for timber importers (either you or your customer). In addition to your general sales information such as quantity (expressed in volume, weight or number of units), your name and address and the name and address of the trader used, if applicable, you will also need the following information:

1. Which country/countries the timber was harvested

2. What species the product contains – common names will suffice unless these lead to ambiguity, in which case the scientific names will also be needed

3. Documents or other information indicating compliance of those timber and timber products with the applicable legislation.

The FSC system will help you to provide the information about the country of harvest and the species to your customer. If your supplier does not automatically provide you with information about country/concession of harvest or species they are obliged to if you ask them for it (according to ADVICE-40-004-10: Access to information regarding species and origin of timber). If this supplier does not have that information, he or she is obliged to use the Advice Note to go further up the supply chain until he or she has obtained the information for you.

Regarding the documents or other information indicating compliance of those timber and timber products with the applicable legislation, some of the applicable legislation is covered by the FSC Forest Management Certification schemes. Therefore, the information indicating compliance is the certificate itself. One area not covered by the FSC Forest Management Scheme are Trade and Customs laws. If your supplier does not automatically provide you with information about compliance with trade and customs laws, they are obliged to do so if you ask them for it (according to ADVICE-40-004-11: Trade and customs laws).



However... Not all certification schemes are created equal

The EU has recently published the **“Study on certification and verification schemes in the forest sector and for wood-based product”** to provide a better understanding of how well certification schemes align with the requirements of the EUTR, which is available [here](#). The findings of this study can therefore be used in the following two ways: - for certification schemes evaluated as part of the study, as a direct support to

the risk assessment, adding detail to this process by providing information on where potential strengths as well as gaps may exist in the coverage of the specific certification scheme, - for other schemes not evaluated as part of the study, this summary report should provide guidance as to how the scheme should be evaluated, identifying both the strengths and gaps which are common to many certification schemes.

Under VPA, Vietnam shall assess voluntary certification and national certification schemes according to VNTLAS requirements in order to recognise schemes that can then be taken into account as a supplementary verifier for the risk-based verification of timber imports.

There are many certification and legality verification schemes operating internationally, these include:

CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS:

- FSC Certification: www.fsc.org/en
- PEFC Certification: <https://www.pefc.org/>
- Sustainable Biomass Program (SBP): <https://sbp-cert.org/>
- ISO 38200: <https://www.iso.org/standard/70179.html>

LEGALITY VERIFICATION SYSTEMS:

- LegalSource Certification: <https://preferredbynature.org/certification/legalsource>
- SCS LegalHarvest Verification: <https://www.scsglobalservices.com/services/timber-legality-verification-legal-harvest>
- Bureau Veritas OLB: <https://www.bureauveritas.fr/besoin/certification-olb>

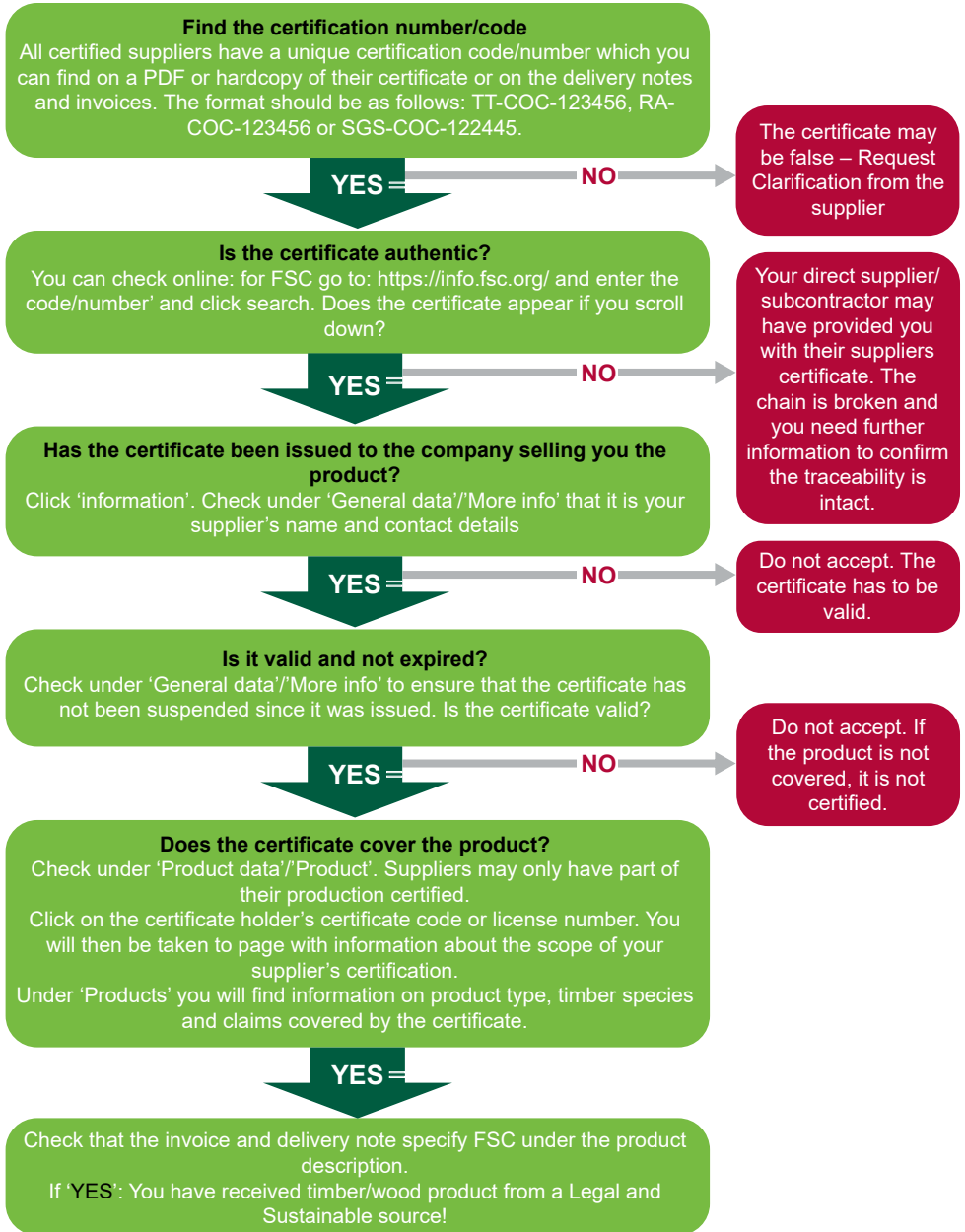


If you are buying FSC Certified – check it's legitimate

Are you sure that you are buying certified? An FSC logo on your supplier's website or invoice does not automatically prove this. Here's a simple guide on how to check the certification status of products that you are buying.

The following tips are useful for any buyer who seeks to buy certified, for example in order to comply with procurement policies.

Note: FSC certificate holders are obliged to regularly verify the validity and scope of their suppliers' certificate.



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