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Seminar on
STRATEGIES FOR THE SOUND USE OF WOOD

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The competitive climate for wood products and paper packaging; the factors causing substitution with emphasis on environmental promotion
Session I

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Summary

Wood and paper were early materials. When few other materials were obtainable, wood was used for a multitude of purposes. Following the advent of new technology and cheap energy materials like reinforced concrete, plastics, steel and aluminium often replaced wood. Lately however the environmental cost for pollution, the use of finite energy resources and the so-called greenhouse effect has entered the agenda, as has the whole concept of sustainable society.

Wood is a truly sustainable material, under condition that forestry operations are carried out in a responsible way, not only regarding forestry volume and reforestation but also regarding wild life, flora and fauna and socio-political aspects of forestry. Obviously the environmental strength of wood and paper products is based on responsible forestry. This presentation is made under the assumption that such a responsible forestry operation will be maintained.

The competitive climate for wood products and paper packaging is a complex of many variables and influencing factors. On one hand wood is often highly regarded from environmental, emotional and practical reasons - people like wood. On the other hand specifiers and ordinary

people may prefer other material. To know the criteria of their choice is critical in order to remedy the situation.

The decision process is also complex. Wishes of a producer or a specifier may differ from the end users, based on different preferences and/or perceived practicality or economy.

Steel studs for partition walls may serve as an example. They are not cheaper than wooden studs and not better for the end user but maybe better for the builder. It is not unusual that someone else than the end user makes the critical decision about materials, occasionally based on erroneous or incomplete information. The decision maker can simply not be convinced that wood is the best choice. Powerful R&D, lobby and promotional efforts by other materials have an influence too.

Wood is thus part of a complex market space. Many different trends and movements occur, some-times overlapping, sometimes in different or even opposite directions. Examples: building codes, fashions, environmental trends, DIY and new trade patterns and the current trend towards a sustainable development, where wood has almost all the advantages. The combined effect of all these trends or movements is reflected in the actual use of different materials, i.e. what is actually bought and used at a given price/ quality ratio.

Finally is there such a thing as a desirable or optimal substitution, seen from a resource point of view or based on function and fulfilment of needs? *The answer is a sound use of wood, which is based on sound environmental principles. Wood meets all requirements of sustainable society and should be used more to reach its goals.*

An example: If the world population and the economic growth would increase by 100 % in 25 years, in the Far East, and in developing countries it appears unlikely that the world's forest resource, although satisfactory now, could grow at the same pace or even be maintained. Then large numbers of people in such a population growth would either risk living in poor circumstances, or put a lot of strain on available energy resources and on the environment, since most of the competing materials pollute, use more energy and originate from finite resources.

Key words : sustainability, environment, competitive climate, and substitution.
