

Green drivers for the wood-based panel industry highlighted

DSM, A GLOBAL market leader in melamine, clearly spelt out the green drivers to assembled laminate and panel producers at the recent TAPPI 2002 Decorative & Industrial Laminates Symposium, held in Atlanta, USA.

In his presentation, Green drivers for a sustainable growth in the wood-based panel industry, Leon Halders, sales and marketing vice-president, marketing and sales, addressed the sustainability and ecology issues, explaining how important these factors are for the growth of the wood-based panel (WBP) industry.

Leon Halders sent out a call to everyone involved in the WBP business column – raw material suppliers, panel producers and retailers/distributors – inviting them to help raise general awareness of the products' environmental virtues.

Any wood product, whether solid timber or wood-based, generates emotive, largely negative connotations, he says. The public's perception is of deforestation, slash and burn, and the rapid depletion of natural resources: where-

as, in reality only a small percentage of forest loss is the result of wood consumption.

Half the forest lost is through clearances and half the remainder is used for fuel (especially in Asia and South America). North America and Asia need 20% of their accessible forest area for wood-consumption, yet the rest of the world need less than 5%! (based on a neutral forestation balance).

North America and Asia in particular, is where the drive for more efficient use of wood resources should be strongest. By contrast, just half of 1% of accessible global forests is needed to meet the needs of the wood-based panel industry – a fact that few people within the industry itself are aware of, never mind furniture producers, distribution outlets and the public at large.

DSM believes that the low wood consumption level in Europe is the result of the wide acceptance and popularity of WBP alternatives. Laminated wood-based panels have a very good price/performance ratio thanks to the efficiency with which wood resources are used.

For example, the wood feedstock used in particleboard or MDF is composed of fast growing manageable species, waste wood, saw waste and recycled wood. Indeed the area of land needed to produce the raw materials for panelled floor covering such as laminate flooring is a factor of 50 to 60 times lower than what



is needed for solid hardwood flooring such as parquet.

In the panel floor over 90% of renewable resources are used. For those countries facing wood scarcity in the future, such as China and North America, wood-based panels offer an attractive compromise by balancing the consumption needs of an increasingly affluent population with sustainable forest husbandry.

DSM Melamine therefore maintains that the WBP industry is not part of the problem but part of the solution. As Leon Halders concludes: "The wood-based industry is a very efficient user of wood resources. Thanks to our industry, fast growing softwood stock can be optimised

and wood waste minimised.

"Unfortunately it is our industry's best-kept secret, so the challenge for all of us now is to spread this very positive message to all of our customers and end-users. Greater awareness will surely bring commercial benefits as well as environmental benefits to us all."

DSM Melamine has taken the initiative by launching its own generic advertising campaign. Under the Unlimited.DSM slogan, the company is illustrating the unlimited possibilities of melamine-based products.

Leon Halders would welcome comments on this challenge to the industry via e-mail: leon.halders@dsm.com.

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