

Responsible sourcing

This briefing note explains the vital role of the structural engineer in specifying sustainable materials and products

Customers, clients and stakeholders are increasingly demanding that responsible sourcing is embedded within the supply chain. They want to know where materials and products come from, how the workers in the supply chain are treated and be assured that the environmental impacts of the materials and associated components, coatings and by products are being actively managed and minimised. The structural engineer has a vital role to play, being tasked with the specification and hence by implication the responsible sourcing of a significant proportion of construction materials.

The demand for responsible sourcing is being driven by a number of factors not least of which are increasing corporate and social responsibility, protection of brand image and assurance of security of supply. In addition, there are also sustainable procurement initiatives and projects supported by Government such as London 2012 and the 'Strategy for Sustainable Construction'. The latter has established a target that 25% of products used in construction projects should be sourced from schemes recognised for responsible sourcing by 2012. Assessment tools such as BREEAM and the Code for Sustainable Homes award credits for responsibly sourced materials.

Example aspects of responsible sourcing are treatment of workers and material traceability:

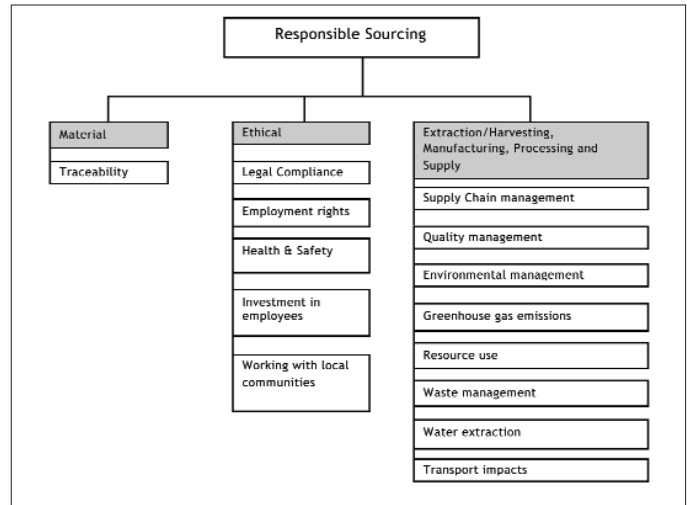
1. The legislative framework within the EU contains a Social Charter which provides legal protection against ethical and social exploitation. Such legislation is not common outside of the EU and organisations need to ensure their supply chain operates to the minimum standards recommended by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in order to demonstrate responsible sourcing.

2. The specifier/purchaser should be able to identify the source of the key components and therefore the conditions under which the material was extracted or harvested. This requires a raw material inventory management system which is also known as the 'chain of custody'. While it is important to know the origins of the components it is equally important to know that any 'added value' steps in the supply chain are equally committed to improve their sustainable performance. Certification to recognised management systems and performance reporting helps ensure that consistent values are present along the supply chain.

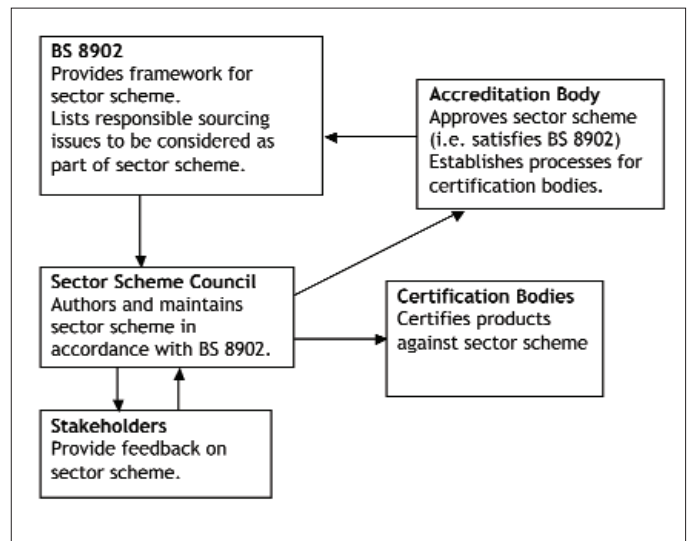
The current BRE responsible sourcing standard, BES 6001 *Framework Standard for the Responsible Sourcing of Construction Products*, published in 2008, provides a common benchmark for construction products to gain credit under both BREEAM and the Code for Sustainable Homes schemes.

BES 6001 considers the activities associated with responsible sourcing (see Fig 1) together with their delivery mechanism using certified management systems. It therefore provides a benchmark to compare all construction products on an equal basis and it is likely to provide a single criterion for responsible sourcing performance in future updates to the sustainable building schemes. The standard allows the recognition of four levels of performance that range from pass to excellent.

The British Standards Institution has subsequently produced a standard for responsible sourcing of construction products (BS 8902). The standard provides the basis for the development of individual sector schemes as shown in Fig 2. The sector schemes can potentially have the same scope as BES 6001; however, the threshold performance requirements of BES 6001 are more



1



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- 1 The activities of the supply chain covered by the responsible sourcing standard BES 6001
- 2 How a sector scheme is set up under BS 8902

prescriptive than BS 8902. As a consequence certification to BS 8902 does not ensure equivalence between different materials. The BES 6001 framework also supports sector schemes and could be developed to gain accreditation under BS 8902. Both standards can be used to help support responsible sourcing in supply chain management.

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