

North American Wood Products Industry Life Cycle Assessment Workshop

A Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) Workshop was organized to review industry programs related to LCA and identify priority action items needed to support a coordinated industry initiative to capitalize on green building opportunities for wood products. The workshop included presentations and discussions on the issues involved in commissioning an LCA study. Additional discussion topics included green building codes, rating systems, and LCA references; an update on work to add wood products data to the U.S. Life Cycle Inventory (LCI) database; and a review of current and planned LCA research. The group compiled a prioritized list of LCA research activities, indicating funding and resource requirements for each activity.

Background

The Green Opportunity Tactical Plan, developed recently by the Green Opportunity Task Group, identified the need to form a working group to review approaches to presenting LCA data in reports, presentations, and communications. The Green Opportunity Task Group was formed to “capitalize on green opportunities for wood products through a unified message and strategic plan.” A secondary goal of the group was to “do better with what we have” and address the challenge of getting industry organizations to better coordinate and function with one unified voice. The group’s recommended approach calls for coordinated efforts between three interest groups: scientific and technical research; policy engagement, codes and standards; and marketing, communications, and education.



Objective

The workshop was planned with several objectives:

1. Gain better understanding of strengths and limitations of LCA as it applies to wood.
2. Understand how LCA can be applied to illustrate the sustainability of wood uses.
3. Reaffirm plans to input wood products LCI data into critical U.S. and Canadian databases.
4. Prioritize current and future LCA research.
5. Establish timeline and identify human, technical, and funding resources needed for success.
6. Document existing and new opportunities to get LCA in use by practitioners.

Approach

A full-day workshop was held at the USDA Forest Service, Forest Products Laboratory, in Madison, Wisconsin, on July 14, 2010.

Expected Outcomes

Expected outcomes are tied to the several action items agreed upon by workshop participants:

- Prioritize current and future LCA research. Once priorities are set, develop more detailed descriptions, budget estimates, and suggest lead investigators. This list has been compiled, and detailed descriptions are being developed.
- Establish task groups for (1) LCI data collection and database updates, (2) soil carbon research, (3) planning for meetings and technology transfer to key trade audiences, and (4) follow-up on LCA research (based on prioritized tasks).
- LCI task group needs to find funding for LCI data work and create questionnaire to evaluate and prioritize updating of existing LCI data in the U.S. LCI database.
- Subgroup meets to explore what needs to be done to approve the Impact Estimator and EcoCalculator as tools for complying with LCA requirements in NAHB/ICC 700 and IGCC.
- Survey industry technical committees on LCA priorities and types of resin used to help identify most immediate LCI data needs. Determine which resins are applied to which composites. Obtain U.S. data for resins and raw materials.
- Contact an American Wood Council industry expert on boilers and dryers to determine access to boiler/dryer data. Convey information to The Consortium for Research on Renewable Industrial Materials (CORRIM).

- Determine if the Department of Energy has an interest in updating their boiler data.
- Create an inventory of CORRIM university research strengths and immediate capacities.
- Work together with broader industry representatives to create a Statement of Purpose for Industry Meeting, slated for the fall 2010.

Timeline

Action items are to be completed by December 2010.

Cooperators

APA–The Engineered Wood Association
USDA Forest Service, Forest Products Laboratory

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