

SUSTAINABLE TIMBER ACTION IN EUROPE

The City of Bremen - Comprehensive sustainable timber procurement

Context – In 2007 the newly formed coalition in the Bremen City Council agreed to incorporate social and environmental considerations within their procurement activities. In 2009 the law was passed. It included the specific instruction to “consider the environmental impact of the product when procuring construction, supplies and services.” To implement this law the City of Bremen trained their procurers and encouraged them to network with each other as well as other departments to get an overview of what people were looking for in products but also to learn how other procurers work. Activities began with some initial “lighthouse” purchases. These were highly visible objects within public buildings, such as new wooden furniture from sustainable sources or laser multifunctional devices. Following these lighthouse examples sustainable procurement was subsequently mainstreamed into all procurement departments.



Subject-matter

Wooden furniture for conference rooms from verifiable sustainable forest management with environmentally compatible cushions and cover fabric

Timber products involved:

Tables and armchairs

Value of tender (EUR)

40.000 €

Type of contract

Framework supply contract

Pre-procurement market engagement

The city of Bremen was initially looking for armchairs and tables with a Chain of Custody (CoC) certificate but after a market analysis it was obvious that such products were not available on the market. Further consultation with potential producers revealed a second problem. Usually the components for timber armchairs, such as seat, backrest, armrest, and the wood-based sheet material (Holzwerkstoffplatte) for the tables are from different sub-contractors and also from different types of wood (solid and ply wood) which makes comprehensive certification, especially CoC, difficult.

Eventually the City of Bremen found a company (VS) which could prove certification for all armchair components and is currently in the process of being FSC CoC certified.

Technical specifications

- DIN EN ISO 9001 (Quality Management System) or equivalent

- DIN EN ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System) or equivalent
- VOC max. 420 g/l
- All solid, ply and veneer timber is from verifiable sustainable forest management, the following minimal criteria have to be complied with:
 - Must comply with Pan-European Operational Level Guidelines for Sustainable Forest Management, PEOLG
 - Outside Europe the forest principles of UN-CED as well as additional directives for sustainable forest management (ITTO, Montreal-Process, Tarapoto-Process, UNEP/FAO dry-zone Africa process) need to be complied with
 - The the supply chain from the forest to the finished product must be verifiable
- Tables and armchairs must be produced in compliance with the ILO core labour standards as well as the BremKern executive law on labour standards (for more information see additional/complimentary measures), these are:
 - No forced labour
 - The right to found unions, be part of them and have collective negotiations on pay
 - No child labour
 - Equal pay for female and male labourers
 - No racial, gender, religious, political or social discrimination
- The compliance with these norms has to be proven for all parts of the supply chain

Verification

- If the product has the Blue Angel certification RAL-UZ 117 (low-emission upholstery) and RAL-UZ 38 (low-emission timber and derived-timber products) all technical specifications are deemed to be fulfilled except for the sustainable forest management specifications
- The same is true for wood-based sheet material for the tables with the Blue Angel certification RAL-UZ 76 (low-emission wood-based sheet material), again excluding the timber origin
- Products which can present FSC or PEFC certification are deemed to comply with all specifications regarding the origin of the timber and the management of the forest
- A seal, certification or membership in a multi-stakeholder organisation can serve as verification for the core labour standards
- Any tenderer providing and FSC or PEFC certification is deemed to comply with the core labour standards

Award/evaluation criteria

The contract was awarded to the company which could most closely provide evidence that all of the furniture components are from sustainable forest management. In addition, the company awarded the contract is also in the process of getting CoC certified which gave the City of Bremen confidence that this was the best possible choice in the light of the limited product range available.

Additional/complimentary measures

With the executive law on labour standards (BremKern) the City of Bremen passed their own labour standards which are identical to the ILO core labour standards. This allows the City of Bremen to place a stronger focus on the labour standards of the timber products and services they procure. The law specifies that the labour standards have to be adhered to by every company in the supply chain.



Problems encountered

CoC certified timber armchairs which were initially to be tendered were not available on the market. In addition, timber armchairs are made from ply and solid wood parts. Therefore even if all parts of the armchairs are certified, the certification is not of the same quality because certified plywood may still contain significant amounts of non-sustainable timber. (Depending on the when the FSC certification was obtained this may be up to 50%, newer certifications are only allowed to contain 15% non-sustainable timber, www.fsc.org/background-information.311.htm)

Results achieved

The result is that the City of Bremen is now procuring a broad variety of sustainable timber products, as both the BREMKERN law and the procurement strategy have been successfully implemented in all procurement departments of the City.

Lessons learned

The market analysis and pre-procurement engagement were vital for the success of the tender. Through long-term engagement with vendors the City of Bremen was able to encourage CoC certification. This type of engagement and communication with timber business can help implement more ambitious strategies of sustainable timber procurement.

Contact

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