



Contact: Steve Lovett
202-258-1536
lovett@softwoodlumber.org

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Industry Group Announces Plans for a Unified Wood Promotion Program Funded by the First-ever Softwood Lumber Check-off

Proposal Published in Federal Register for industry Comment

The Blue Ribbon Commission for Softwood Lumber Check-off (BRC) announced today that a proposal to create a softwood lumber check-off to fund a unified softwood lumber promotion program, was published in the Federal Register and will be available for comment until November 30, 2010.

[call out box] To review the softwood lumber check-off go to <http://www.regulations.gov/> and type "softwood lumber" into the search box. Scroll down to find the documents related to the proposed softwood lumber check-off, the first of which will be the proposal. To comment on the proposal, click on "submit a comment" to the right under Actions.

"This is a strong, well-thought-out idea based on proof that current softwood promotion programs are getting results. Continuing these efforts will create enormous opportunities for our industry," said Jack Jordan, chair of the BRC and executive vice president of Jordan Lumber & Supply, Inc., in North Carolina. "A successful check-off program would be a game-changing investment in the future of softwood lumber in North America; it's time to make this possibility a reality."

Current efforts by the Binational Softwood Lumber Council to expand and regain market share in non-residential and residential multi-family markets as well as to recapture ground in the outdoor living market are paying off with tangible results. But the Binational Council's funds are limited, and ultimately a more long term funding model is required, leading the industry to develop a check-off.

The 1996 Farm Bill provided the opportunity for a fair, unified, binational North American check-off program with cross-border equity with respect to financial contributions, process, and governance. The check-off truly would be a North American effort to significantly grow markets for softwood lumber and improve cross-border cooperation.

Check-off programs have been used by agricultural commodities – beef, pork, eggs, etc. – in the U.S. for 50+ years with strong records of perception-changing success. The softwood lumber promotion program, funded by the proposed softwood lumber check off will be governed by a board of industry representatives. This board will be representative of producing regions and scale of companies. . Government involvement assures funding stability over time, which has been a major shortfall of past voluntary softwood marketing programs.

The Blue Ribbon Commission, a working committee of 21 North American softwood lumber industry leaders, first met about 18 months ago to ascertain the viability of a check-off program. Several factors led to the decision to pursue the option, including eroding market share, untapped markets, and the pervasiveness of misinformation from competing products throughout the marketplace.

Funds collected through a check-off will be used to create a promotion program targeting building industry professionals and key influencers. This program will seek to increase share for softwood lumber in key building markets such as non-residential construction and facilitate the development of new game changing technologies such as cross-laminated timber. The research, marketing and communications program elements are expected to include clear and consistent messaging, pro-wood environmental marketing and a focus on the natural strengths, affordability and practicality of softwood lumber.

The timeline for the check-off program calls for an industry referendum next spring. If successful, the program should be up and running by mid-2011. Given the ongoing pressures facing the industry from competitive forces and downturn in the housing market, this is exactly the right time for the industry to combine their efforts in a unified approach.

“To grow the pie, a program of this size and scope is exactly what we need,” continued Jordan. “It’s time for us to take the measures necessary to ensure a successful future for the softwood lumber industry.”

For more information on the proposal for a softwood lumber check-off as well as information on other programs under the Binational Softwood Lumber Council, please visit www.softwoodlumber.org.

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