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Finding the competitive edge

Facing tough wood products markets, Canadian producers are looking for a competitive edge—and are finding it with CertiWood and its broad range of services, including certification.

By Jim Stirling



James Shaw, CertiWood's president (above), oversees the range of services such as one-stop, third-party independent certification for wood products CertiWood offers at its technical centre in North Vancouver, BC (below).



Tolko Industries Ltd made a pivotal move while it was seeking Canadian and US certification for its new I-joist plant in Alberta. The company turned to the CertiWood Technical Centre for custom evaluation.

The team of professional engineers and technicians at CertiWood obliged by fabricating and testing the proposed product and providing Tolko with the detailed data it required to help it make the best product development decision.

Undertaking testing for quality and product development is one of a range of services offered by

CertiWood at its technical centre in North Vancouver, BC. And—as the name suggests—the organization provides one-stop, third-party independent certification for wood products. These include plywood, OSB, LVL, I-joists and glulam.

“As business gets tougher and world markets more competitive, the necessity for manufacturers of engineered wood products to have complete confidence in their certification services provider becomes increasingly more important,” points out James Shaw, CertiWood’s president. “No marketer of engineered wood products can be careless of product quality assurance from market to market.”

CertiWood has been offering its integrated services for years but launched a re-organization process in 2006 to broaden its scope and focus. Shaw says part of the rationale was to become leaner and cut costs—which CertiWood has succeeded in doing by about 30 per cent—and create an elevated benchmark for service.

One facet that hasn’t altered, except perhaps to become more entrenched, is the importance of CertiWood as a third-party auditing association, to ensure customer confidence in the safety and integrity of the wood products it evaluates, he explains. And they’re looking to do more of that. “We’re working hard to expand our market share,” adds Shaw. That is never a simple process.

Most engineered wood product testing and certification agencies are US-based and larger organizations. “What makes us different, apart from being a Canadian-based organization and service provider, is the relationship with our current customers,” continues Shaw.

CertiWood put that to the test recently with a customer satisfaction survey. Shaw says it revealed a better than 95 percent satisfaction level with CertiWood’s services. Getting the job done in a timely fashion and assuring the integrity of the wood product being assessed were commonly cited as reasons for the thumbs up for CertiWood’s services from its customers. CertiWood plans annual assessments of its customers to ensure it stays on track and remains responsive to any changes in customer requirements.

Shaw says CertiWood has an important role to play in the regulatory environment. This means the wood products it certifies can be used with confidence in North American markets as well as offshore with accreditation granted CertiWood by Japan and the UK. The work it does on committees relating to ISO and CSA goes hand-in-hand with opening the marketing door wider for Canadian wood products.

CertiWood’s Technical Centre comprises a 750 square-metre structure in North Vancouver. It’s capable of testing full scale components. The centre has a host of sophisticated equipment and systems used to test and evaluate engineered wood products. Some of them were designed and built in-house by CertiWood’s staff members.

The equipment includes machine systems for testing bending, tension, and compression for full size wood product specimens. Other equipment assesses shear, loading and bending capabilities. The Technical Centre also offers performance testing for simulating loads on concrete form work, roof and floor systems; a rain chamber for accelerated exposure tests; and a humidity conditioning chamber.

The testing and evaluation systems and the fast, accurate and computerized data they produce, help a re-energized CertiWood provide engineered wood product manufacturers with a competitive marketing edge.

