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Dealing with Green

While advocates push for a Green New Deal, schools and universities have been pursuing environmental improvements and sustainable strategies for years.



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From Forest to Floor

Why green thinking matters when it comes to flooring choice.

BY DON BROWN

EVERY year billions of dollars are spent on renovations and construction in schools. Spaces such as gymnasiums, classrooms and auditoriums are repaired and rebuilt, each time using more natural resources. Regardless of those impacts, upgrades must still be made in order to keep facilities functioning. But the question remains: Is there a better way to purchase materials and upgrade schools while minimizing environmental implications?

When it comes to hardwood flooring products used in sports complexes, gymnasiums, stages and practice rooms, sustainable manufacturing processes make an impact. With so many products and options available, it can be difficult to find products that are responsibly manufactured.

The following considerations can help school officials, architects and decision-makers understand whether the flooring they're considering was manufactured using sustainable practices.

LOOK FOR PRODUCTS THAT HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLY HARVESTED.

Although the hardwood maple logging industry has used responsible practices domestically for decades, responsible harvesting is crucial for the self-preservation of the industry, as well as for future generations and businesses.

Maple trees need to be selectively harvested, meaning an area should not be completely clear-cut when logged. Companies that selectively harvest cut down only the mature trees. This enables sunlight to penetrate into the forest so seedlings can develop. Maple is a self-sustaining renewable resource and when the canopy is opened, seedlings that naturally drop have a chance to grow.

Timely harvesting of mature trees also ensures the tree is captured before it starts to decay. When trees rot, this renewable resource cannot be used—it simply goes to waste or can become fuel for wildfires.

When education institutions seek out maple floor products from responsible manufacturers, they're helping ensure the natural resource is used and not wasted.

Schools can verify their floor has been responsibly harvested by requesting products that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or similar foundations.

LOOK FOR RESPONSIBLE MANUFACTURING PRACTICES.

In addition to making sure flooring products come from sources that consider the future of the forest, schools can practice sustainability by sourcing their flooring from companies that practice environmentally friendly manufacturing.

Facility managers can seek products that have a third-party verified Environmental Product Declaration (EPD), which proves the product was sustainably harvested and manufactured.

An EPD evaluates a product's impact on global warming, water pollution, ozone creation and greenhouse gas emissions by reviewing a product's manufacturing process, its environmental impact and the type of greenhouse gas it's emitting.

Any company can claim to have EPD certification, but third-party organizations such as SCS Global Services will verify products are truly certified and registered.

Facility planners also can look for products that come from certified zero-waste or carbon negative plants. This means none of the wood left over from the manufacturing process is wasted. Wood waste can and should be reused. Wood scrap can fuel the kilns required to dry fresh-cut lumber; it can be used to heat a manufacturing facility itself; and it can be supplied to wood pellet manufacturers for a clean source of heat for homeowners.

Carbon-negative manufacturing offers even more environmental benefits. According to Fast Company, being carbon negative means a business "goes beyond achieving net zero carbon emissions to actually create an environmental benefit by removing additional carbon dioxide from the atmosphere."

When you see a manufacturer is zero-waste or certified as carbon negative, you know they are committed to environmentally friendly practices.

Understanding the certifications and processes that contribute to responsible harvesting and manufacturing can help schools understand the impact their facility's upgrades have on the environment. ■

BIO

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