

Creating a Fair Paper Procurement Policy in Ontario

Submitted by the Timmins Chamber of Commerce

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Issue:

At a time when many forestry companies in Ontario are in dire straits financially, the Ontario government plans to change its policy for the procurement of paper to exclude two of the three previously approved certification processes from access to 30 percent of the supply.

Background:

In 2004, David Ramsay, then Minister of Natural Resources, announced that all Ontario forest companies operating under sustainable forest licenses would have to be certified by 2007 through any of the three major certifying bodies recognized by the Ontario government: the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), or the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). Certification with an independent auditor is done to ensure that the forest operations comply with recognized sustainable forestry practices in their day-to-day operations, and was seen as a way to make Ontario's forest industry more competitive. However, in September 2007, Gerry Phillips, as Minister of Government Services, announced a paper procurement policy that would give preference to one certification standard over the others.

This new government policy stated that next year 30 percent of all paper purchased by the Ontario government will come from FSC-certified forests only, and move toward 50 percent by 2012. We question why the Ministry of Government Services decided to exclusively award a portion of the government's business to companies certified by one standard, when the Ministry of Natural Resources agreed to recognize all three certification standards.

Ontario has world class forest management practices, and local forestry companies such as Domtar, Tembec, Norbord, and AbitibiBowater have all become certified to one or another of these three independent, internationally accepted certification processes at considerable expense. This policy suggests that the SFI or CSA certification processes are somehow inferior, or do not result in sustainable forestry practices.

Recommendation:

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to act immediately to amend the Ministry of Government Services' 2007 procurement policy and instead, adopt a policy requiring the Ontario government's paper come from forests certified by any one of the three standards they endorse.