

# Chain Of Custody Explained



## Background

In recent years there's been a huge increase in public and corporate interest in environmental issues. Nowhere is this more evident than the move towards certifying timber and timber products to demonstrate that they come from responsible and properly managed sources. Most industry sectors now recognize the need for and benefit of sourcing responsibly managed timber and timber products, whether it's for furniture, building materials or paper and packaging products.

## Forest certification

Forest management certification is the first link in the chain and involves the inspection of forest management processes by a recognized, independent certification body who determines whether the forest is managed according to an agreed set of standards. If the forest complies, then an operating certificate is issued. Certified forest operations can then claim that their timber comes from responsibly managed forest.

## Chain of Custody certification

Chain-of-custody is the unbroken path taken by that timber, from the forest to the consumer, including every stage of processing, manufacturing and distribution. It provides evidence that timber products originate from certified, well managed forests and verifies that they're not mixed with products from uncertified forests at any point in the supply chain, except under strict controls. Each stage in the chain is subject to independent scrutiny and certification and must be able to demonstrate that material from certified sources is identifiable and can be segregated from non-certified material.

## Certification standards

International certification standards are set by the Forestry Stewardship Council® (FSC®) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC). Both are international (non governmental), not-for-profit organisations, dedicated to promoting the responsible management of the world's forests.

For more information go to [FSC® Explained](#) and [PEFC Explained](#).

## Do you need a Chain of Custody certificate?

Only if your customer wants to buy FSC or PEFC certified product from you and you have access to FSC or PEFC certified material, which you do from Warren Board. We can supply you with a range of chain of custody certified sheet stock, reel stock and mill makings, enabling you to extend the custody chain to your customer when you gain FSC and PEFC certification yourselves.

## How do you prepare?

This doesn't have to be daunting. If you have any experience of developing or managing an externally audited and certified scheme such as ISO9000 or ISO14001 you should find it relatively straightforward – and we can help you if you're concerned.

First of all, decide which standard you want to meet. FSC will be the likely choice but there are many similarities between the two standards and most certifying bodies will assess you against both for a small additional fee.

Obtain copies of the standards from the FSC and PEFC websites (see below) and then 'map' your business process flows, identifying critical control points. Manage these by putting effective controls in place and document them in written procedures, adapting existing operating procedures if you have them. Train staff to ensure that everyone knows what they're doing and - most importantly - maintain accurate records of what's bought and sold.

## How do you get a certificate?

It's very similar to other externally audited certification processes. A number of certifying bodies are approved by FSC and PEFC to audit your systems and issue certificates on their behalf. You'll find lists of them on the FSC and PEFC websites. Some will be willing to provide you with a gap analysis as part of the certification package. This can be useful if you don't want to employ a consultant but you're unsure about any aspect of either standard. We used BM Trada [www.bmtrada.com](http://www.bmtrada.com) and found them helpful but you may already be dealing with an external certifier who can provide this service. Typical audit lead times are 6 to 8 weeks from booking and depending on your turnover, cost should be in the region of £2,000 - £2,500.

## Points of contact

For more information and advice, please contact David Whitaker at Warren Board  
[david.whitaker@warrenboard.co.uk](mailto:david.whitaker@warrenboard.co.uk)

Useful website addresses:

[www.fsc-uk.org](http://www.fsc-uk.org)

[www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)

[www.bmtrada.com](http://www.bmtrada.com)