

Furniture industry takes lead in sustainability

A major Australian manufacturing industry sector is taking its own positive steps towards saving the environment, with the launch of an industry-wide standard promoting sustainability in manufacturing.

The AFRDI 150 Sustainability Standard has been researched and developed by the Australasian Furnishing Research and Development Institute (AFRDI), an independent not for profit testing and certification organisation based in Launceston, Tasmania. Standards regulate many activities in manufacturing, ensuring products meet strength and durability requirements, that they are fit for purpose, and do not contain toxic products, for example.

The launch of the Sustainability Standard is seen as a first for a major Australian manufacturing sector - in this case one employing 65-thousand people. The standard also applies in New Zealand, where 15-thousand people work in the furnishing and related industries.

The new sustainability standard is to be known as the AFRDI Green Tick, and joins AFRDI's respected and well-known Blue Tick certification, denoting strength and durability in a range of furniture for domestic and commercial users. AFRDI also gives Orange Tick certification for a range of bunk beds, signifying compliance with safety standards, and its leather logo, part of AFRDI Standard 146, identifies real leather.

"The AFRDI Green Tick rounds out and gives great additional strength to our organisation's testing and certification program," says AFRDI CEO Bob Panitzki.

"Compliance with the AFRDI Green Tick will demonstrate an acceptance by the furniture manufacturing industry to work towards a wide range of requirements which benefit the environment, the conservation of resources, and ultimately the consumer."

Mr Panitzki said the new standard:

- Commits manufacturers to ethical use of labour, in particular avoiding the exploitation of low-paid overseas labour on imported goods (many Australian manufacturers import furniture components)
- Obliges them to consider chain of custody issues in ethically sourcing raw materials, especially timber products
- Makes necessary the designing of products which can be easily recycled or re-manufactured to avoid being scrapped as landfill



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Standards, Testing and Product Certification for Commercial, Domestic and Nursery Furniture in Australia and New Zealand

- Encourages the use of co-generation of power from manufacturing waste, to conserve energy, and
- Encourages manufacturers and distributors to investigate ways to make goods transport more efficient, through use of environmentally acceptable fuels and through techniques such as freight pooling – using the power of IT to gather together freight deliveries from a variety of sources to a common destination.

“In producing this new standard,” Mr Panitzki added, “we are very aware that we are really just drawing a line in the sand and saying, this is how we see the situation now, and it represents our best efforts to make sustainability a workable concept.

“But we expect our understanding will change as the science of sustainability matures, and so the standard will be a living document that grows in parallel with that understanding.”

AFRDI board chairman, Peter McCutcheon, said the AFRDI Sustainability Standard addressed concerns being raised by governments and the community about the need to address all steps of the manufacturing process, from sourcing of materials and labour, right through to making best use of old furniture to generate new furniture.

“The concern that governments and the private sector have about sustainability is now being expressed in tender documents, which specify that environmental and sustainability criteria must be satisfied.”

Mr McCutcheon said the new AFRDI Sustainability Standard in effect had two bottom lines.

“One is that as a society, we have to be more responsible about the way we use precious resources. You could say that launching a standard like this one signals the beginning of the end for the throw-away society, where you buy goods cheaply, and simply toss them out in a few years time.

“The second bottom line is that the consumer is going to get a much better product, one that will last a long time, and when the end of its life comes, it will be readily recycled or remanufactured. That’s a big plus for society.”



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