

# The Sensible Environmentalist

## Where's the Green Steel?

(NAPS)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**  
**My son thinks steel is environmentally friendlier than wood because it's recyclable, but I think wood is better because it grows back. Who's right?**



Dr. Moore

You've touched on a pet peeve of mine—the fact that many environmental groups support the use of steel or cement over wood, even though wood is the most renewable and sustainable of all the major building materials. Wood also has the least impact in terms of total energy use, greenhouse gases, air and water pollution, and solid waste.

These groups demand that wood be certified as coming from sustainably managed forests—which is as it should be. In North America alone, there are now three independent certification programs, all requiring third-party audits of forestry activities and the number of acres certified has risen dramatically. This can only be good for the environment.

But where's the green steel and concrete? Why isn't the environmental movement demanding that these industries submit to their own independent audits for sustainability? Steel and concrete are both nonrenewable, require vast amounts of energy to manufacture and recycle and are major

contributors of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. At the very least, they should not be given preference.

I've ruffled more than a few feathers by pointing this out but it makes sense to me that using wood is good for the environment. When we use wood, we create demand in the market, which gives landowners around the world an incentive to plant more trees and keep lands forested. As an added benefit, growing forests take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, which helps to offset emissions released through industrial processes.

There are those who claim that each time we use wood we cause a little more forest to be lost. This cannot possibly be true when you consider that North Americans consume more wood per capita than anyone else in the world and yet our forests cover about the same area of land as they did 100 years ago. Does this not stand as proof that our forests are being renewed?

We have the tools at our disposal to achieve real environmental progress. As a sensible environmentalist, I believe that one answer is to choose renewable, energy efficient materials such as wood.

*Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com.*