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Environmental Groups Warn Consumers: Don't Be Duped By Phony Timber Industry Ecolabel

San Francisco — On Wednesday, November 12, Rainforest Action Network and a coalition of leading environmental groups will launch Don't Buy SFI, a consumer campaign to educate Americans about the truth behind the timber industry's phony new SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) ecolabel. The Don't Buy SFI campaign will launch concurrent with the North American Wholesale Lumber Association convention in Dallas.

The campaign includes a web site (www.DontBuySFI.com), grassroots in-store surveys and print ads debunking the AF&PA's misleading claims about SFI-labeled wood and paper products. DontBuySFI.com lets the pictures speak for themselves in an SFI Hall of Shame, a photo gallery of SFI-certified lands that have been decimated by clear cuts and chemicals. The site also contains an extensive library of downloadable reports and studies about the SFI from groups including Forest Ethics, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, American Lands Alliance, Dogwood Alliance and the Natural Resources Defense Council. The campaign calls on consumer activists to ask their local home improvement retailer and office supply stores not to carry SFI-labeled products.

On Monday, November 10, Mr. Colin Moseley, chair of the Sustainable Forestry Board received a letter from Rainforest Action Network requesting that it discontinue use of the SFI label until basic environmental standards are met. The letter points out that the SFI fails to protect old-growth forests; fails to protect roadless areas and federal lands; fails to protect forests from conversion to plantations and sprawl; fails to adequately restrict clear cutting and chemical use; fails to adequately protect and help recover endangered or imperiled species; fails to protect indigenous rights; and fails to provide chain of custody linking labeled products to certified forests (www.dontbuysfi.com/letter).

Reacting to mounting market pressure to protect endangered forests and adopt sustainable practices, in 2002 the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) launched the SFI label, a misleading multimillion-dollar marketing scheme, which has featured full-page ads in the *Wall Street Journal* and other leading financial publications as well as spots on National Public Radio. Few groups outside of the timber industry recognize the legitimacy of the SFI label. Organizations ranging from The U.S. Green Building Council (www.usgbc.org) to virtually every major environmental group have denounced its credibility. Corporate leaders including IKEA, Home Depot and Kinko's prefer FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) (www.fscus.org) certified products.

"Since Home Depot's historic 1999 announcement that it was getting out of endangered forests and promoting FSC certification, U.S. logging companies have felt intense public pressure to clean up their act. But they haven't. SFI member companies don't know where more than half of their wood and paper comes from, yet the industry calls its operations sustainable. We call it certified deception. When you look past the greenwashing, it's easy to see that the SFI is the Same-old Forest Industry," said Michael Brune, executive director of Rainforest Action Network.

"It is unconscionable that America's largest logging companies can betray the public trust and put a phony green label on products that destroy old-growth forests. The timber industry knows that Americans care about saving endangered forests, but rather than actually changing its practices, the logging industry chose a marketing blitz instead. For consumers concerned about sustainably harvested trees, the Forest Stewardship Council is the only label to look for," said Jennifer Krill, old growth campaign director of Rainforest Action Network.

"With regard to sustainably-harvested lumber, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, highly-regarded body of professionals developing and refining standards for sustainable wood use. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), by contrast, is an industry-sponsored group whose purpose is wood certification via self-governance. Notwithstanding the bewildering flurry of facts and quasi-facts that are being tossed about in an already complex debate, relying on SFI to certify lumber is in my view tantamount to hiring the fox to guard the chicken house. As a professional engineer, but mostly as a father, I would prefer that there still be healthy old-growth forests around when my grandchildren's children are here in my place. For that reason, I can only in good conscience rely on FSC to deliver to my clients truly sustainably-harvested wood.," said Bruce King, consulting structural engineer and director of Ecological Building Network.

"Clearly, by the evidence of past practices, the forest products industry is not sufficiently objective or motivated to set standards which will ensure the continuing existence of health forest lands for our children and their children. We need objective standards without self-interest involved in setting the bar. We will be using FSC, not SFI, products for certified Green Built homes," said Bruce Hammond, president of Hammond Fine Homes and board member of the U.S. Green Building Council.

"I'm sorry, but I just don't trust the timber industry to police itself. We need a truly independent certification program to keep the timber corporations from continuing their forest destruction practices. The FSC is the only organization that I trust," said Gary Gerber, president of California Construction Services Corporation, Sun Light & Power Company.

According to an August 2003 poll for American Demographics magazine, 70 percent of Americans say they are more likely to buy a product if the company that makes it is known to implement environmentally friendly practices in its operations. SFI program members include Weyerhaeuser (NYSE: WY), Georgia-Pacific (NYSE: GP), Sierra Pacific Industries, Pacific Lumber Company and nearly all of the top U.S. logging companies.