Adkwik

WHITEPAPER

Environmental compliance

A competitive advantage for joinery manufacturers

Why certification is shaping the joinery market

Environmental and wellbeing certifications have become a defining part of the commercial property sector. Developers and occupiers now expect buildings to show measurable environmental performance and provide healthy indoor conditions. These requirements are increasingly formalised through certification systems such as BREEAM, LEED and the WELL Building Standard.

For joinery manufacturers supplying interior fit-out elements including doors, panelling, decorative boards and cabinetry, these frameworks create both an obligation and an opportunity.

The materials used within interior environments are assessed as part of a building's environmental performance, particularly in relation to indoor air quality.

Manufacturers that understand how their materials influence compliance can therefore provide tangible value to contractors and designers. In doing so, they position themselves more strongly in procurement processes where environmental credentials are becoming an increasingly significant factor in decision-making.

A strong grasp of certification requirements is one of the biggest competitive advantages for manufacturers currently.

Overview of the main environmental and wellbeing standards

A number of certification systems influence material selection in commercial construction. The following are among the most widely recognised:

BREEAM

The Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) is widely used to assess sustainability of UK and European buildings against a scoring framework. It evaluates against a range of categories and awards ratings ranging from Pass to Outstanding. Interior materials can contribute to credits within areas such as indoor air quality and responsible material selection.

LEED

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is a global building certification system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council but widely used on international commercial developments. It assesses sustainability across a number of areas. As with BREEAM, the use of low-emission and responsibly sourced materials contributes to achieving higher certification levels.

Indoor air quality certifications

Alongside whole-building certification schemes, product-level certifications assess the emissions performance of individual materials. One example is Indoor Air Comfort certification, which verifies that products meet strict limits for volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions. These certifications provide independent evidence that a material can support compliance within broader building certification systems.

WELL Building Standard

The WELL Building Standard focuses on anything affecting the health and wellbeing of building occupants, including air quality, lighting, thermal comfort and mental wellbeing. Strict limits apply to pollutants including VOCs and formaldehyde, and interior materials must meet rigorous emissions criteria.

Across all standards, furniture and fit-out components are required to have low emissions.

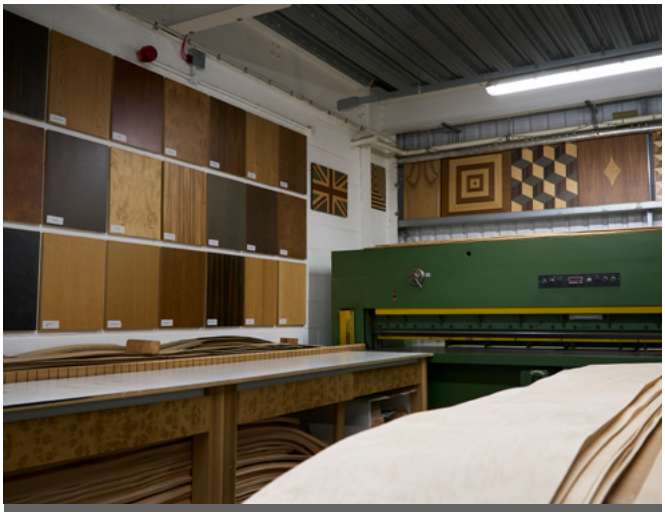
How materials and processes contribute to compliance

VOC emissions

VOCs are chemicals released from a wide range of building materials, including engineered wood products, coatings and adhesives. In enclosed environments they can affect indoor air quality and occupant health.

For this reason, building certification schemes increasingly require materials with low VOC emissions. Products may either be tested directly for emissions performance or supported by recognised certification schemes.

For joinery manufacturers, this means that every component within a finished panel or door can influence a project's environmental compliance.



Reduction in VOC emissions is the primary focus in all standards.

Formaldehyde content varies across different boards.

Substrates and board materials

The choice of substrate is a major factor in emissions performance. Engineered wood boards contain varying levels of formaldehyde, depending on the type of resins used during their production.

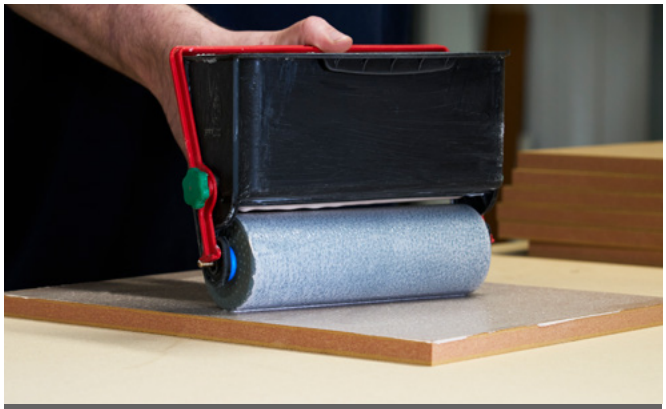
Many modern panel products are designed specifically for low-emission environments and are supported by documentation demonstrating compliance with indoor air quality standards. Specifying such materials can significantly improve the environmental performance of finished joinery components.

Finishes and coatings

Surface finishes, including lacquers, paints and varnishes can also affect indoor air quality. Solvent-based coatings in particular may release VOCs as they cure.

However, modern coating systems such as water-based or UV-cured finishes are often formulated to minimise emissions while maintaining durability and appearance.

Surface finishes have widely differing emission rates.



Some adhesives have high emission rates, but options are available.

Adhesives and bonding systems

Adhesives are another contributor to VOC emissions. Traditional adhesive systems may contain formaldehyde or other chemicals that release VOCs during curing and over time.

Low-VOC and formaldehyde-free adhesives are therefore increasingly used in interior applications. Where adhesives have been independently tested or certified for emissions performance, they can provide valuable supporting evidence for projects targeting environmental certification.

Manufacturing practices

While certification schemes typically assess the emissions performance of materials rather than production methods, environmental practices within manufacturing can still influence procurement decisions.

Energy efficiency, waste reduction, and carbon-reduction initiatives may not directly contribute to certification points, but they can strengthen a manufacturer's sustainability credentials when competing for projects.

Processes aren't rated, but can boost a manufacturer's standing.

A five-step process for joinery manufacturers to capitalise on the opportunity

Understanding certification requirements is only the first step. To translate that knowledge into commercial advantage, manufacturers can adopt a structured approach:

1. Review your material portfolio

+ Review materials that you already use.
+ Identify those that contribute positively to indoor air quality.

2. Target projects with certification requirements

+ Demand for compliance is higher in some sectors.
+ Identify where compliant materials provide most value.

3. Understand the client's compliance objectives

+ Clarify early on which specific criteria must be met.
+ Align material choices based on the clarified requirements.

4. Build a documentation library

+ Compile a centralised library of documented evidence.
+ Explore opportunities to increase compliant options.

5. Include compliance evidence in tenders

+ Provide compliance documentation when tendering.
+ Demonstrate a strong grasp of compliance requirements.

Conclusion
Making compliance work for your business

Environmental certification is becoming more embedded within how buildings and interiors are deigned and made, and that's not likely to change.

For joinery manufacturers it's a chance to add value, to show that you understand what your clients are trying to achieve, and that you can help them get there.

With the right support, Adkwik's expert advice on glue line processes and material selection is an opportunity that's well within reach.

Hands-on support from the experts

Our team of specialists has extensive experience in researching and manufacturing leading adhesive products that comply with the very latest standards. Speak with our friendly team today about how to meet the requirements of your client's commercial property objectives.

Get expert advice

Also from Adkwik:
Formaldehyde Legislation: Changes in August 2026 and what you need to do about it

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