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**MEDIA CONTACT:
SANDRA BISHOP 604-312-9737**

Simulated Earthquake Test in Japan Proves Safety and Durability of Coastal Forest Products

PENTICTON, BC – B.C.'s coastal forest industry took a major step this week toward regaining market share in Japan with a unique simulated earthquake test of products specifically designed for the Japanese housing market. The successful test will be presented to mayors attending the Union of BC Municipalities annual conference by the Minister of Forests and Range in Penticton, B.C. on September 25, 2008. A video of the Japanese test will show the mayors how coastal hemlock used in traditional Japanese homes can withstand the strong seismic forces that levelled Kobe in 1995. Using one of the most powerful three-dimensional seismic shake table facilities in the world, located in Tsukuba, a full-sized three-storey Post and Beam (P&B) traditional house survived the test with flying colours.

The successful full-house shake table test illustrates the technical developments that have taken place through a six-year research program, worth \$1.2 million, to promote the superior performance and use of Canadian forest products in both residential and commercial applications in Japan. Working together, Japan's Building Research Institute, the Centre for Better Living and the Public Works Research Institute, UBC's Department of Wood Science and the forest industry conducted the test to document how coastal hemlock structural products, known as Canada Tsuga in Japan, and Canadian engineered oriented strandboard perform in some of the most severe seismic forces ever recorded.

Attending the shake table test in Japan, Coast Forest Products Association's President and CEO Rick Jeffery said: "Seeing first-hand how traditional homes can withstand powerful earthquake forces is a truly astounding experience, and one that drives home the central importance of developing the research and knowledge base that helps to keep Japanese housing at the forefront of the world in safety and durability."

Remarkably, Japan experiences 100 earthquakes a year. The computer model developed by UBC predicts the earthquake performance of P&B structures that use B.C. wood and will prove to Japanese

regulators that coastal hemlock meets regulations regarding seismic performance, strength and warranty conditions for housing

Minister of Forests and Range, the Honourable Pat Bell, believes the success of this test cements the long-term future for the coastal forest industry in Japan. “Japan is BC’s largest offshore forest products market and technical work of this nature helps to supply our Japanese customers with confidence that our products contribute to stronger, safer and more seismically durable homes.”

The Kobe earthquake disaster raised the level of safety concerns for Japanese homeowners, causing consumers to link their desire for strong housing to high strength building materials. The shake table computer modeling is the first tool of its kind to define the structural performance of building systems based on the properties of housing components.

The B.C. coastal forest industry has been supplying hemlock to Japan for decades and the product was very widely accepted for use in P&B construction, but the earthquake and a downturn in the Japanese economy resulted in a serious loss of market share for the coastal industry.

UBC Professor Emeritus David Barrett, Department of Wood Science, notes that as wood use in Japan evolved more to dry products, some misperceptions developed about the performance of hemlock. “It was very important that we develop a new marketing strategy and a new technical program to overcome those perceptions, and we have.”

The Governments of British Columbia and Canada, through Forestry Innovation Investment Ltd. and the Canada Wood Export Program, have provided significant financial support in the research that led up to this test while industry has supplied Canada Tsuga product and OSB materials.

The Japan earthquake video will be posted on Coast Forest’s website Thursday morning. Visit www.coastforest.org



Canadian and Japanese researchers simulated an earthquake near Tokyo this week as powerful as the 1995 Kobe earthquake to test the strength and durability of this traditional Japanese house built entirely of BC wood products.

Photo Credit: Coast Forest Products Association



Built entirely of B.C. hemlock and oriented strandboard, this 3-story full size Japanese Post & Beam house is being constructed to undergo a simulated earthquake as powerful as the 1995 Kobe earthquake to test the strength of BC wood products.

Photo Credit: Coast Forest Products Association