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New Hemlock Product Designed to Win Back Japanese Market Share

VANCOUVER, BC – A new grade of hemlock lumber has been designed for the Japanese market from a joint research initiative between the B.C. and federal governments, Coast Forest Products Association and the University of B.C.

Japanese certification of the new hemlock grade was announced at a ceremony in Tokyo at the Canadian Embassy today. The new E120-F330 grade marks an important step in regaining ground in the Japanese lumber market.

Hemlock accounts for 60 per cent of the coastal forest industry's fibre supply and Japan is the coastal forest industry's number one customer for the species. B.C.'s share of that market declined over 50 per cent from 1994 to 2004, mostly due to Japan's changing regulatory environment, a shift in buyers' preferences, and imports of laminates from Scandinavia, China and Russia.

"Our new hemlock product is a key step for the coastal forest industry to increase our competitiveness and market share in Japan," says Rick Jeffery, President of Coast Forest Products Association, "We are the first producers to have a kiln-dried solid wood product that is superior in strength to our competitors' laminates. The new product meets the unique needs of our Japanese home building industry and has the potential to double our market share there."

B.C.'s new hemlock product is the result of a \$2 million product development program, and is not only stronger, but also more economical than laminates. The kiln-dried hemlock grade was developed at UBC and is part of an on-going cooperative effort between industry and the Government of Canada and the Province of B.C. to develop new market opportunities for the coastal forest industry.

"This government is committed to revitalizing the coastal forest industry," says Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman. "That's why we are working with our partners, like Coast Forest, to develop innovative new products that will attract new customers in traditional markets like Japan."

With a strength rating higher than laminates or Douglas fir, it's expected that the use of the new hemlock product will increase in roofing and post applications for Japanese housing where traditional post and beam construction is still very popular.

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