

Businesses trading timber urged to prepare for change

Businesses trading timber between Great Britain (GB) and Northern Ireland (NI) are being urged by the UK Government to take action to ensure they are prepared for the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.

The government has confirmed:

- Due diligence checks will take place on timber flowing from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.
- Due diligence checks will take place on timber flowing from the European Union (EU) to GB and GB to EU.
- No new due diligence checks will take place on timber flowing from NI to GB.
- No new due diligence checks will take place on timber flowing from the EU to NI.

There will be no changes to the current process for businesses importing from outside of the EU and UK producers first placing timber on the internal market – they will still need to carry out due diligence as before.

To comply with their obligations, timber traders will be required to tell the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS):

- who they bought the timber from;
- who they sold it to (regardless of species, product or country of origin), through evidence such as an invoice; and,
- both traders and operators (importers) will be required to keep records for five years.

In the same way as they do now, operators are required to exercise due diligence to ensure that timber and timber products have not been illegally harvested.

The changes will be relevant to a range of businesses who use timber, including importers and operators, exporters, those working in the construction industry, furniture manufacturers, paper and pulp manufactures, and the forestry industry.

There will be no change to the way timber due diligence requirements are enforced. However, failure to comply with the timber regulations and enforcement ranges from warning letters, through to court cases, to an unlimited fine and up to two years in prison.

Importers of timber from third countries already have to carry out due diligence, except if they are importing from a country which has an operational Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) in place and that import is covered by [a forest law enforcement, governance and trade \(FLEGT\) licence](#).

From 1 January 2021, the European Timber Regulation (EUTR) and FLEGT will become UK domestic legislation as the UK Timber Regulations and FLEGT. The requirements under the UK Regulations remain the same as under EUTR.

Free guidance and tools are available on the [OPSS website](#) and [on GOV.UK](#).

The new free-to-use Trader Support Service will provide support and guidance to businesses moving goods under the Northern Ireland Protocol. Businesses who [sign up to the Trader Support Service](#) will be guided through the new processes under the Northern Ireland Protocol and can also use it to complete digital declarations.