



## From the Editor

# Time for an end to false environmental claims

*This edition of Concrete Today addresses the issue of concrete and the environment.*

*In recent years, the concrete industry has been the victim of a well funded campaign to portray its materials as the 'culprit' in the environmental equation. The purpose of this campaign, is to encourage substitution of concrete with timber products - supposedly for environmental reasons. Regrettably, a number of state environmental agencies have fallen victim to a campaign of deliberate misinformation and have ended up acting as 'platforms' for the promotion of timber products. In so doing, they are acting in a misinformed and partisan manner and not as independent government agencies.*

*Central to the 'anti-concrete' campaign is the attempt to replace science with emotive environmental slogans. However, independent studies do not support the 'anti-concrete' slogans and interpretations. Two of the main indicators for assessing environmental impact are 'embodied energy' and 'embodied CO<sub>2</sub>'. Figures produced recently by a group of independent Irish consultants, show that one tonne of softwood has 10 times the embodied energy and 8 times the embodied CO<sub>2</sub> as one tonne of structural concrete. These figures would not suggest that timber is more friendly to the environment than concrete.*

*In contrast to Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) assessments which take 'cradle to grave' factors into account in measuring environmental impact, the slogans of the timber industry are invariably based on 'non-holistic scenarios' which are purposely designed to give timber some advantage. Great play is made of the fact that lightweight framed structures warm up rapidly - little or no mention is made of the fact that they also cool rapidly due to lack thermal mass. To give timber an apparent advantage, environmental impact figures from the 'construction phase' are often quoted, specifically because it is well known that concrete has a significant advantage in the 'in-use' phase which accounts for 90% of the overall environmental impact. Likewise, comparative environmental impact figures are quoted which include the recycling of timber but which conveniently ignore the fact that concrete is 100% recyclable.*

*In promoting timber - 'yellow science' is the order of the day. A whole plethora of independent LCA studies have shown that substituting concrete with timber is of no advantage whatsoever to the environment. But the exaggerated claims persist!*

*If the Irish construction industry is to further improve its environmental performance, the debate on the environment must be based on science and not on wishful thinking and distortion. Both professional bodies and government agencies have a role to play in ensuring fair and balanced representation on this issue.*

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