

design for FREEDOM

overview

A global movement to end forced labor in the built environment



The problem

Global laws forbid the use of slave labor in the built environment, yet the materials that go into our buildings are heavily reliant on forced labor.

Almost 25 million people are working in forced labor conditions and close to 160 million children from the ages of five to 17 are subjected to child labor globally.

The human suffering embedded in building materials is much harder to know than the tensile strength, energy efficiency, or even carbon footprint. And yet, without an intentionality of practice, designers, manufacturers and builders risk “baking” forced labor into their projects – fusing the legacy of abuse into the very life cycle of the building.

The construction industry is the least modernized and most disaggregated industry, accounting for more than 13% of global GDP with a 1% productivity annual growth rate over the past 20 years. Modern slavery found in the construction industry is rife with forced labor, with exploitation occurring on both sides of the building life cycle: raw material production and the construction site. The building materials

supply chain is getting a labor transparency pass, yet materials account for approximately 45% of the cost of an average project in an industry with razor thin margins.

Unchecked and unregulated forced labor in the material supply chain subsidizes a project’s return on investment (ROI) and is also linked to environmental degradation.

The materials at-risk

The disaggregated and opaque nature of the construction industry increases the risk of worker exploitation. The complexity and the thousands of unique raw and composite materials per building makes it nearly impossible to knowingly purchase slave-free materials. We have developed a growing list of risky raw and composite materials, as well as global “hot spots,” which can provide navigation to make ethical decisions. The groundbreaking [*Design for Freedom Report*](#) (October, 2020) and [*Design for Freedom Toolkit*](#) (2022) note 14 + at-risk raw and composite materials: *bricks, copper, electronics, glass, minerals, polysilicon in solar panels, precursors, rubber, steel & iron, stone, textiles, and timber.*

Know the laws and assess risk

Slavery is illegal in nearly every country, and countries are moving to make corporations more accountable. Details on specific laws and policies are included in the [Design for Freedom Report](#). Policies move enforcement to a more proactive, industry-wide posture, and are therefore tools of prevention and prosecution.

Regardless of the variations of these instruments, they boil down to one takeaway: **firms are no longer able to outsource responsibility for abuses in their supply chain, but now have a duty of care to know who makes their inputs and under what conditions.**

- 1900–2021 U.S. Lacey Act (illegal logging)
- 2000 UN TIP Protocol
 - U.S. Trafficking Victims Protecting Act
- 2010 California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (CTSCA)
- 2015 U.S. Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act (TFTEA)
- 2015 U.K. Modern Slavery Act (MSA)
- 2017 French Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law
- 2018 Modern Slavery Act – Australia
- 2021 U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act

TFTEA holds significant tracking and compliance weight globally as it prohibits all products made by forced labor, including child labor, from being imported into the U.S., which is a leading importer of goods worldwide.

The movement

Launched in October 2020, Design for Freedom by Grace Farms has an audacious mission to harness the power of the built environment for justice: to create a radical paradigm shift by removing forced labor from the building materials supply chain. The movement was initialized by Grace Farms Foundation and has galvanized more than 80 industry leaders and experts to join a working group and movement. Together, we work to illuminate forced labor in

the building materials supply chain and develop and incorporate an anti-slavery ethos in the design and construction process.

Over the last several decades, the sustainability movement has helped pave the way for this next step in material transparency and architectural justice.

At this historic time, social injustices, climate crisis, global conflict, and the COVID-19 pandemic have illuminated supply chain risk and lack of transparency. Design for Freedom leaders are initializing institutional responses to employ ethical material selection and procurement practices and embrace material circularity to eliminate material flow where forced labor is the most prevalent while increasing environmental sustainability.

Pragmatically, mandating a measure of material transparency in new projects is just beginning with leaders in the movement. Advocates ranging from owners to construction managers to manufacturers and associated AEC teams will benefit from transparency tools and platforms, leading to market transformation.

The call to action | Design for Freedom Pilot Projects

“Are our buildings ethically sourced, without forced labor, as well as sustainably designed?”

“Where are the raw and composite materials sourced from and by whom?”

Raise these questions and select a number of materials and products on your next project to determine the provenance of the materials and conduct a material fair labor transparency assessment. We are also asking for Material Libraries at universities and design firms to add a fair labor input filter and adopt the Design for Freedom Principles. Any effective movement depends as much on its participants as its leaders – change comes from within and is spurred on by public demand.

DESIGN FOR FREEDOM OVERVIEW

Design for Freedom has begun enacting these principles with leading innovators and through several **Design for Freedom Pilot Projects**, including the 21st Serpentine Pavilion *Black Chapel* designed by Theaster Gates and located in Kensington Gardens, London; the Harriet Tubman Monument, *Shadow of a Face* designed by Nina Cooke John in Newark, NJ; and the New Canaan Library and Grace Farms installations in New Canaan, CT. We expect over 1 million people to experience these public projects annually. Collaborations in both the private and public sectors have been initiated, but it is only the beginning.

Whether as an individual or as an organization, we all have a duty to act

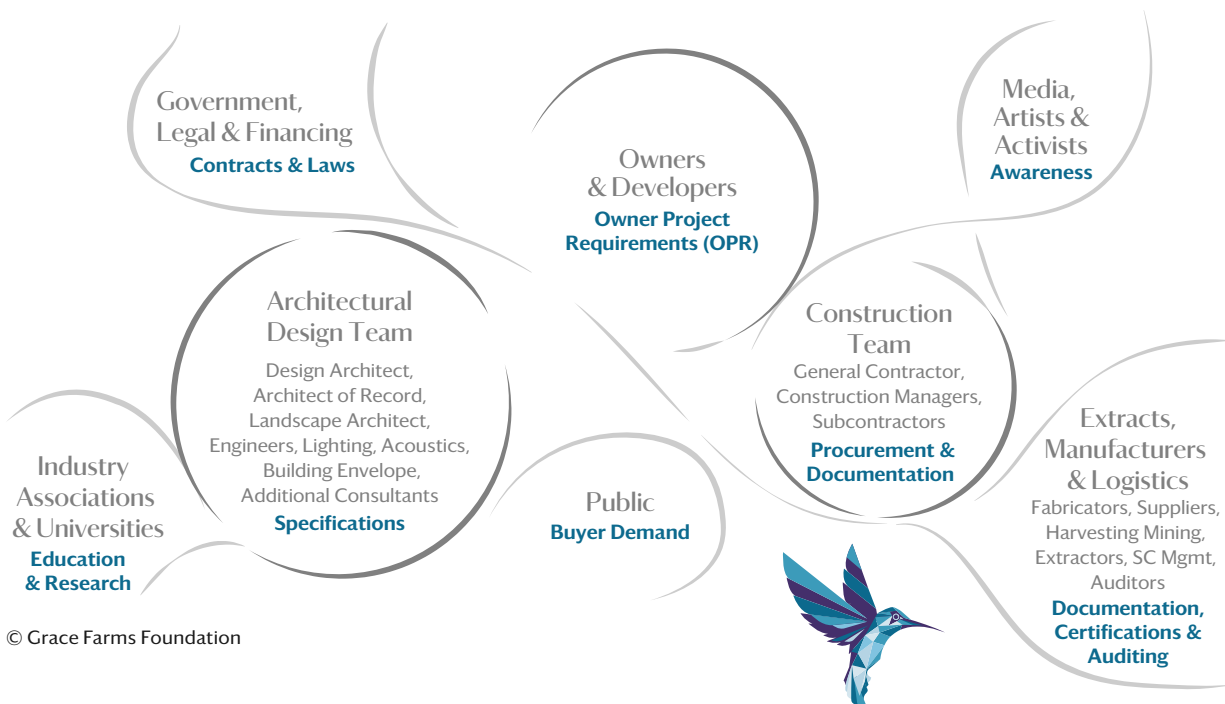
We invite all project teams, universities, governments, and the public to join us in this critical humanitarian work. Together we will reduce the industry's dependency on forced labor, which subsidizes ROIs, and which will in turn unlock innovation and lower environmental degradation. Use the [Design for Freedom Toolkit](#) and let us know about your project and findings as we begin to assemble data in our expanding Design for Freedom material knowledge base.

Through Design for Freedom, the entire ecosystem of the built environment can and must work together to design and build a more humane future.

To learn more and stay updated, visit designforfreedom.org

Ecosystem of the built environment

Means and methods to ethically influence the building material supply chain



[Download the Design for Freedom Overview](#)