

US, EU hardwood imports fuel Amazon destruction: Greenpeace

March 20 2018, by Sebastian Smith



Brazil says 6,624 square kilometers (2,557 square miles) of Amazon rainforest was destroyed in 2017

Scores of US and European companies selling the hardwood ipe for things like decks and garden furniture are fueling an illegal trade devastating the Amazon rainforest, Greenpeace said Tuesday.

An investigation listed 37 US companies as the main clients of Brazilian exporters selling wood "with evidences of illegality."

Companies in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Portugal were the next biggest buyers of the suspect wood, according to the 27-page Greenpeace report, titled "Imaginary [trees](#), real destruction."

Greenpeace said Brazilian loggers and corrupt officials run sophisticated laundering scams that allow them to cut down far more of the majestic tree than allowed, yet still obtain the official documents needed to export at huge profits.

Purchasers in rich countries should be more aware of what they're importing, the report said.

"It is safe to say that it is almost impossible to guarantee if timber from the Brazilian Amazon can be assumed to have originated from legal operations," said Romulo Batista, Greenpeace Brazil's Amazon campaigner.

The ipe is capable of growing 30-40 meters (100-130 feet) tall and is one of the densest, hardest woods in the world, sinking when placed in water.

That makes an outstanding material for outdoor furniture and decking, including parts of New York's famous Coney Island Boardwalk.



Brazil said the rate of deforestation in the Amazon fell by 16% between August 2016 and July 2017, compared to the same period 12 months earlier

But because the ipe is scattered thinly through the forest—its exuberant pink, purple, yellow or white flowers punctuating the Amazon's green canopy—logging requires wide-scale destruction.

"Victims of their own magnificence, ipe trees can be easily spotted in the middle of the Amazon," Greenpeace's report said.

Once processed into flooring or other products, a cubic meter (35 cubic feet) of ipe can be worth \$2,500 at export.

'Cooking the books'

Greenpeace says that US companies imported 10,171 cubic meters of ipe between March 2016 and September 2017, while 11 EU countries collectively imported 9,775 cubic meters over the same period.

"The high value of ipe... makes it profitable for illegal loggers to

penetrate deep into the forest," Greenpeace said in the report.

"Unscrupulous loggers tear the rainforest open with illegal roads, unlawfully invading protected areas and Indigenous lands, degrading the forest and often committing acts of violence against local forest-dwelling communities."

Brazil's government said last year that the rate of deforestation fell by 16 percent between August 2016 and July 2017, compared to the same period 12 months earlier.



Conservationists say each bout of deforestation not only removes habitat for tropical wildlife but significantly contributes to increases in carbon dioxide

But even though that was the first decline in three years, it still amounted to 6,624 square kilometers (2,557 square miles) of destruction.

Each bout of deforestation not only removes habitat for tropical wildlife but significantly contributes to increases in [carbon dioxide gas](#), the main driver of global warming.

And for the illegal harvesting of the Amazon's ipe trees and other hardwoods, fraud is as much the logger's weapon as chainsaws and bulldozers, Greenpeace said.

In Para state, for example, corrupt engineers fake inventories for an area of forest, inflating the number of trees or listing low value trees as high end trees, Greenpeace says.

These phony trees are then used to generate legal credits that unscrupulous loggers use instead for their illegal haul of ipe trees felled in protected areas.

"State agencies subsequently issue credits for the harvesting and movement of this non-existent timber," Greenpeace said.

"These credits can then be used to 'cook the books' of sawmills that process trees illegally logged from forests on [indigenous lands](#), protected areas or public lands."

The full report is available at: [greenpeace.org.br/hubfs/Greenpeace_Report_Imaginary_Trees_Real_Destruction_March_2018.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.org.br/hubfs/Greenpeace_Report_Imaginary_Trees_Real_Destruction_March_2018.pdf) target="_blank">www.[greenpeace.org.br/hubfs ...](http://www.greenpeace.org.br/hubfs...) ction_March_2018.pdf

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