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Contact: Andrea Johnson

andreajohnson@eia-international.org

+1 202 483-6621



ILLEGAL LOGGING DECLINES AS TOUGHER POLICIES, ENFORCEMENT RISE

New study recognizes impact of the U.S. Lacey Act in controlling illegal timber

Washington DC – Illegal logging declined as much as 25% worldwide over the past decade, with reductions as high as 50% - 75% in key countries, but work is not done, according to a new study released by the London-based think tank Chatham House. The report, based on data from twelve countries involved in the global trade of timber, emphasized the key role of signals sent by legislation such as the Lacey Act, a U.S. law recently amended to criminalize trade in illegally-sourced timber, and the European Union’s new prohibition on the import of illegal wood.

Enforcement actions in producer countries like Indonesia and Brazil, coupled with the increase of demand-side signals to require legal sourcing and punish irresponsible buyers, are increasingly helping to reduce the prevalence of illegal practices in some of the world’s most threatened forests.

The study states it has “already identified positive effects of the Lacey Act amendment in terms of the response of producer and processing-country governments and the private sector.”

Alexander von Bismarck, Executive Director of the Environmental Investigation Agency, commended the report’s authors for their thorough research and credible results. “Our field investigations have consistently revealed that illegal loggers are encouraged by importers who fail to ask tough questions about the source of their material. This study shows that practices can change quickly when buyers are held responsible for the legality of the wood they purchase,” said von Bismarck.

The global climate has benefitted as well: if cut down, the forests protected by these policies would have emitted between 1.2 billion and 14.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide – at the upper end, almost double the US’s annual greenhouse gas emissions. Actions to improve governance and stem the trade in illegal timber in both producer and consumer nations will also prove critical to the success of programs designed to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation.

The Chatham House report illustrates some of the challenges ahead for continuing the eradication of the illegal timber trade. The growing position of China as a major importer, manufacturer, and consumer of raw wood and finished products highlights the need for concerted international action to close off all potential outlets for illegal wood.

Sam Lawson, one of the study’s authors, considers the overhaul of regulations in major importers outside the U.S. and Europe essential to preserving the gains of the past ten years: “Remaining consumer countries such as China, Japan, and Australia must act aggressively to eliminate the trade from their markets. Illegal logging is still highly profitable, and those who benefit from it will be open for business as long as they can act with impunity.”

[View the report online at: <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/911/>]

Additional information:

The Environmental Investigation Agency investigates and lead campaigns against environmental crimes around the world. It has decades of experience investigating illegal logging and the international trade in threatened wildlife.