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Europe bars illegal timber from markets

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The European Parliament today voted overwhelming to bar illegally logged timber from E.U. markets.

The legislation, which passed 644-25, will require all companies selling timber products in the E.U. to prove their wood is legally sourced. Companies that fail to demonstrate credible sourcing practices will be subject to fines.

The rules will go into effect in 2012, but paper products will be exempted for five years.

The legislation was supported by domestic timber producers and foreign exporters whose margins have been eroded by sales of illegal timber, which is usually less expensive than legal timber. The U.S. recently enacted a similar measure: the Lacey Act.

Green groups, which have long pushed for tighter controls on the timber trade, welcomed the move.

"This is a very important piece of legislation," said Faith Doherty, a campaigner with the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), who as a member of Indonesian NGO Telapak was kidnapped, beaten and threatened with death in January 2000 while investigating illegal logging in central Kalimantan. "By having this law, Europe is taking responsibility for a huge market that has driven the demand for cheap tropical timber."



Oil palm development for palm oil production in Sumatra, Indonesia

"This law hangs up a 'closed for business' sign to a destructive market," added Greenpeace EU forest policy director, Sébastien Risso, in a statement. "It promises to level the playing field so legitimate companies and customers are better able to act sustainably."

20 percent of timber imported to Europe — worth \$1.1 billion — is estimated to come from illicit sources.

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