



## Group fights L.B. plan to use rainforest wood

Queensway Bay: Ipe from Brazil might not be credibly certified.

By ART WONG, Staff Writer

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LONG BEACH — An environmental group is protesting the city's plan to use hardwood harvested from the Brazilian rain forest for a waterfront boardwalk and piers outside the new Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific.

Rainforest Relief, a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based group concerned with the deforestation of the world's rain forests, objects to the use of a hardwood called "ipe" unless it comes with certification from a sanctioning body acceptable to environmentalists.

"The rain forest is being destroyed by the logging of (ipe and other) woods," said Tim Keating, a Rainforest Relief representative. "At the current rate of loss, the rain forests will all be totally destroyed or seriously degraded within about 30 years. These forests are a major storehouse of genetic information, home to at least 50 percent of the earth's species."

- The city has ordered 67,000 square feet of ipe at a cost of about \$300,000. The highly durable, mahogany-like hardwood will be used for piers and to partially cover the 2,000-foot-long boardwalk surrounding a harbor at the heart of the city's half-billion-dollar, tourist-oriented Queensway Bay project.

"We were very concerned about depleting the rain forest," said Robert Paternoster, the city's manager for the Queensway Bay project. "In our specifications (for supplying the hardwood) we required that it be certified as having been specially harvested and inspected.

"Now Rainforest Relief is saying there is a lot of corruption among the certification groups and we can't rely on (the one used)."

Keating met with Paternoster last week, demanding a postponement of the boardwalk project until an acceptably certified rain forest wood could be found. That might cause a delay of about two months.

He also called for a city ordinance restricting the use of rain forest woods to only those that are approved by the Forest Stewardship Council, a certifying group acceptable to environmentalists. And he urged the city to establish an environmental affairs department or environmental review committee to review such purchases in the future.

Paternoster said Monday he is looking into the Rainforest Relief's suggested alternative of using acceptably certified Bolivian ipe.

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But he added that a switch is unlikely because the city already has a contract for the Brazilian ipe, and the wood already has been delivered to a lumberyard in Tustin and is scheduled for installation in March. The first phase of the Queensway Bay project, the new harbor and aquarium, is scheduled to open to the public June 20.

“We thought we had the right procedure and we still think we have the right procedure for buying the wood,” said Paternoster.

“We’re sick that we didn’t find out about this sooner,” said Keating, who learned about the city’s plan from a lumber recycler about a month and a half ago.

According to Keating, the Brazilian intelligence agency has investigated illegal logging and determined that “80 percent of logging in Brazil is done illegally, exported with paperwork that has been obtained through bribery, doctored in some way....”

Illegal loggers cut highly damaging roads through the rain forest to harvest woods such as ipe, and then they cut down the very best species -- those most valued as seed trees -- without regard for future growth, he said.

Rainforest Relief does not propose a ban on the harvesting of rain forest timber, Keating added. “What we want is a higher standard of logging, one that invests in a good, high-standard management scheme” to sustain regrowth of the rain forest, he said.

He added, however, that his group has no evidence that Long Beach’s wood was illegally harvested. His group is concerned that the use of rain forest woods are not being properly regulated. There is no federal regulation on the importation of rain forest woods.

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