

RAINFOREST RELIEF

WHY NOT TO BUY LAUAN

The demand for lauan (tropical plywood) causes tropical forest destruction and illegal intrusions on indigenous peoples' lands, mostly in Southeast Asia. Indigenous cultures are gravely threatened as their forest homelands are ruined by logging.

ENDANGERED RAINFORESTS & PEOPLE

Lauan is a generic term that is typically used for tropical plywood sold in the US. The name was originally from the Philippines, the first country of origin for US tropical plywood imports in the 1940s and '50s. A new production process allowed for the use of 80% of the trees in the Philippines, thus driving massive logging. Philippines has now lost 85% of its original forests, 80% of that due to demand for plywood exports. Philippines is now a net wood importer. Illegal logging there still drives violent conflict between loggers and native people and landowners. Death threats are common.

In the 1970s demand shifted to Thailand (now 85% deforested) and then in the '80s to Malaysia. By 1985, Japanese and Malaysian logging companies were eliminating the forest homelands of dozens of native cultures and wiping out hundreds of endangered species. Native people, notably the Penan, began blockaded logging roads into their customary lands, which were theirs to use according to Malaysia's constitution. The government brought in the police and army, used beating and incarceration to break up the blockades and keep the wood flowing. Mitsubishi was the major company doing the logging and exporting the plywood. Malaysian Borneo is 65% deforested.

With the leveling off of Malaysian exports, demand shifted once again, this time to Indonesia. Indonesia now produces 90% of the world's tropical plywood exports. Indonesia's rainforests are expected to last only another 10 years at the current rate of logging.

Overlogging in Malaysia and Indonesia has led to massive forest fires both in 1983 and again in 1997/98. The latest first devastated wildlife populations as well as blanketed Malaysia and Singapore in smoke for months.

Brazil is heavily increasing tropical plywood production.

ILLEGAL LOGGING

It has been estimated (and confirmed by the Indonesian government, UN and World Bank) that 75% of logging in Indonesia is being done illegally. Intrusions into park and preserves are so common that there is now permanent infrastructure in the parks for moving logs. Threats, intimidation and bribes keep the logging going.

With the loss of these irreplaceable rainforests, Indonesia is losing native orangutans, hornbills and other critically endangered wildlife.

Illegal logging in Brazil is estimated at 80% of exports.

THE CONSUMER'S ROLE

The United States is the second largest importer of tropical plywood (after Japan). Lauan is used for paneling, sub-flooring, cabinet and furniture backing and drawers, custom shelving and cabinetry, trailer paneling, interior doors, and theatrical and movie set construction. These sets are usually used for one show and then discarded.

What You Should Do

Do not buy (or, if you are a designer, do not allow the use of) tropical plywood. Excellent alternatives exist. For set construction, Homasote and Sonoboard, products made from recycled paper, work well for many uses. High-density fiberboard and hardboard and recycled plastic sheets can replace lauan in other cases. Certified domestic hardwood plywood is available and only costs a bit more than lauan. Check Rainforest Relief's website for more information about these and other alternatives.