

COP-OUT ON STOLEN WOOD FLOORS

ILLEGAL wood imports caught the attention of the European Union recently. It was a perfect opportunity for tough action. But the EU bottled it. It meekly asked timber traders to seek 'guarantees' that their wood imports come from legitimate sources, a decision described by green groups as 'toothless'. In other words, the plea to these hard-nosed and price-fixated dealers is to police themselves ... without penalty.

It's like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas. But in this case the turkeys are running the EU. The evidence is clear and the situation is dire – WWF estimates that 20% of tropical wood imported into Europe originates from criminal sources.

And Britain is the biggest culprit. Over 3.5m cu m of timber on sale in the UK is stolen. Much of this is hardwood flooring.

Despite our obsession with 'cheaper' wood floors, a recent Labour MP's private member's bill to ban imports of stolen timber was rejected by Gordon Brown, who is now presenting himself as saviour of the world's threatened rainforests. The prime minister has proclaimed a plan by Johan Eliasch, the multimillionaire and former Conservative Party treasurer.

Mr Eliasch says the rich nations should pay poor countries (by way of carbon credits) to protect their rainforests. Dream on Mr Brown! Have you forgotten the global recession?

The rampant destruction of the irreplaceable rainforests is more complex than Mr Eliasch admits. The frightening fact is that an area the size of England in precious rainforest is being wiped out every year, massively boosting greenhouse gases.

Despite widespread political support, the Eliasch plan has more holes than a garden sprinkler. It fails to address illegal

logging by organised criminal gangs or western dependence on fossil fuels; or, for example, that his plan might siphon off cash from crucial renewable energy developments of cause corruption and conflict in some third world recipient countries.

Mr Eliasch sees the rainforests – not as a vital resource for the survival of mankind – rather as a basic commodity to be traded; thus allowing rulers of poor countries to blackmail rich donors, saying: 'Give us more money or the rainforest gets it!'

But there is one ray of hope. You would not have expected any 'green' moves from America under George W Bush, who has an abysmal environmental record. Yet last summer the United States became the first country in the world to actually ban the import and sale of illegally-sourced wood.

This surprising move emanated from the US Congress and was strongly supported by one Senator Barack Obama, now President-elect Obama, who has put 'green recovery' high on his agenda. So in a welcome reversal of the long and painful years of the Bush administration, America may – at long last – take the lead in concerted international action to curb climate change. The world will be counting on President Obama!



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For starters

In these days of tough economic times job applications are scrutinised more closely.

A flooring manufacturer, interviewing for a sales representative's position recently, received an application for m with one answer that caused some raised eyebrows:

Question: 'Have you ever been arrested?'

Answer: 'No.'

The follow-up question (for people who had answered 'yes' to the previous question) was: 'Why?'

Answer: 'Because I never got caught!'

Points of view, the readers' forum, is on page 24

Contract Flooring Journal (CFJ)
is published monthly by



www.contractflooringjournal.co.uk

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Printed by Ghyllprint, Heathfield, Sussex.

Suppliers have paid for promotional photographs.

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& subscriptions:
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Great Danegate,
Eridge,
East Sussex TN3 9HU

EDITORIAL ADDRESS ONLY Y:
102 Queens Road,
Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9JU

SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK £45

Europe £80

Rest of the world £160

Single copy £5



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Official journal
of the
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Association

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Please note: All editorial copy should be
sent to the publisher at: 102 Queens Road,
Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9JU