

## STOP BUYING STOLEN WOOD FLOORS!

**T**HE UK is the world's third largest importer of stolen timber, after China and Japan, according to the WWF. It claims that Britain spends over £712m a year on wood from criminal sources, 65% of which is used in construction, including hardwood flooring. And, even more disgracefully, the majority of this is plundered from precious rainforests, causing catastrophic effects on global climate.

So what is the British Government doing to combat illegal logging? As the most influential flooring magazine, **CFJ** put this question to the minister for trade and development, Gareth Thomas MP. In response, he has written an article exclusively for publication in **CFJ**. (See page 8)

Mr Thomas describes bootleg timber as a highly complex problem. For example, massive areas of forest are being destroyed to make way for lucrative palm oil plantations. Aside from environmental devastation, there are serious economic and political consequences in the countries of origin. The minister outlines the active diplomatic role the UK is taking within international bodies, including the EU.

Pressure groups, including WWF, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and the Environmental Investigation Agency, plus MPs of all political parties, are urging the government to ban the import of pirated wood. However, Mr Thomas tells **CFJ** that, if implemented unilaterally, such a measure could fall foul of World Trade Organisation rules.

But the flooring industry is in no position to point a finger. There is strong evidence that certain major wood flooring

producers and local floor covering retailers and distributors are selling hardwood floors, including tropical ranges, from uncertified and, sometimes, highly questionable sources.

Despite denials by the accused firms that their products are 'illegal', the conditions in a free market economy mean that with any demand (even if it is unethical), there will always be someone unscrupulous enough to supply it.

An official clamp down on contraband wood may not be imminent, but there is an alternative. Determined action by a substantial group of people can dramatically diminish the UK's thriving black market timber business.

If you buy, specify or install wood flooring, always ensure that every product carries certification proving that it is from environmentally and socially responsible sources. There are several certification schemes, the most widely recognised being that of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Use only certified wood. Do this for the sake of future generations.

If everyone in the wood flooring sector takes a principled stand, the loathsome merchants of smuggled timber will soon see one of their key markets quickly shrinking.



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