

From: Rainforest Action Network <rainforest>

/* Written 4:57 PM Oct 7, 1994 by rainforest in igc:ran.news */
/* ----- "Activists seize mahogany" ----- */

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Activists seize mahogany

Fifty rainforest activists shut down the Thompson Mahogany Company in Philadelphia for four hours on August 8. They seized mahogany shipments that had been traced to illegal logging operations on Amazon Indian lands in Brazil. Two activists staged a sit-in, blocking the only gate of Thompson's lumber yard. Another two climbed to the top of wood pallets inside the yard, unfurling a banner. Representatives from Rainforest Action Network, Rainforest Action Groups, and Greenpeace met with Thompson Mahogany president Don Thompson late in the afternoon. He denied importing illegal mahogany, refused to agree to an independent audit of his sources, and rejected a request that he lead the industry in stopping illegal timber imports. The Delaware Valley Rainforest Action Group is now preparing a formal stolen-property complaint against Thompson Mahogany to present to Philadelphia prosecutors. "Don Thompson's refusal of an independent audit suggests either he has something to hide or simply does not care where his shipments come from," said Atossa Soltani, RAN's wood conservation campaign director. "Mahogany is murder," the demonstrators shouted. "We're not just talking metaphorically," said RAN executive director Randy Hayes. "Rainforest destruction imperils the whole planet, but we're telling the world that mahogany cutters are actually murdering people who dare stand in their way. This is quite simply murder for profit." Brazilian newspapers have reported dozens of killings of logging opponents from eight Indian tribes since 1988. Activists based the seizure on the common-law doctrine of recovery of stolen property. Hayes said, "We have seized the mahogany to let people know their mahogany furniture is made from stolen goods and that it comes at the cost of human lives and the destruction of forest ecosystems." Thompson Mahogany is one of the top ten importers of the wood to North America. Most mahogany exported from Brazil and Bolivia is illegally logged on indigenous peoples' lands and protected conservation

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areas. Brazil's Roman Catholic bishops estimate 95% of the logging in Amazonas is illegal. By searching import/export statistics, RAN determined that Thompson receives regular mahogany shipments from at least two companies recently found guilty by Brazilian courts. A third Thompson supplier briefly lost its export license last year, when it which was caught with mahogany illegally obtained from indigenous reserves. A fourth supplier, whose labels appeared in the Thompson yard in late July, is linked to a Brazilian company found guilty of illegal logging in December, 1993. Eighty indigenous and environmental groups in Brazil have called for a moratorium on mahogany logging to assess damage to the species, the forest ecosystem and indigenous peoples' land. Rampant exploitation of mahogany timber is also destroying Bolivian and Central American rainforests. In support of the Brazilian groups, RAN and other environmental organizations want consumers to stop buying mahogany products. The U.S. groups are also asking the Clinton administration to push for mahogany to be listed under Appendix II of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). This move would not constitute a ban, but would supports efforts of mahogany-producing countries to regulate the trade and protect the long-term survival of the several mahogany species. The Convention meets in Florida in November. Activists can pressure their senators, representatives, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to support mahogany's listing under Appendix II.

From World Rainforest Report, October-December 1994 Published by:
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Tel:(415) 398-4404 Fax:(415) 398-2732 Rainforest Action Network is a non-
profit activist organization working to save the world's rainforests and
support the rights of indigenous peoples. Begun in 1985, RAN works
internationally in cooperation with other environmental and human-rights
organizations on major campaigns to protect rainforests.

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