



W DANGER IN THE WOODS

When we sit down at a table to discuss issues, rarely do we ponder the problem literally right before us: the table itself. There's a good chance that it's crafted from environmental damage, corruption, money laundering, organized crime, and human-rights abuses. Throughout the world, loggers are unlawfully harvesting, transporting, and selling timber taken either from protected regions or in prohibited quantities from land set aside for lumbering. In fact, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an NGO committed to responsible forest management, estimates that some countries, such as Indonesia, harvest as much as 80 percent of their lumber illegally. Such irreparable deforestation threatens endangered species and biodiversity, and costs governments billions in revenue.

In Russia, according to the World Wildlife Fund, illegal logging accounts for up to half of all lumber in the country's eastern region (where the presumably legal wood-processing plant pictured

above is located). Much of that wood winds up in China and, eventually, at U.S. retailers. Recently, the nonprofit Environment Investigation Agency charged Wal-Mart with "turning a blind eye to illegal timber sources in its supply chain" by selling products manufactured in China and made from illegal Russian lumber. Russia is also IKEA's largest wood source, providing one-fifth of its worldwide supply, and the furniture seller concedes that it "can never guarantee that IKEA products are not made from illegally logged wood." However, companies such as Wal-Mart, IKEA, and Home Depot do partake in the FSC's certification program, which assesses forests for sustainability. So far, the FSC has certified about 9 percent of the world's forests for sustainable lumbering.

What about the other 91 percent? Despite the efforts of governments, NGOs, and retailers, unlawful chopping of trees persists. And given that less than 5 percent of Home Depot's wood products comes from certified forests, it's clear that we're not even close to being out of the illegal woods. —VADIM LIBERMAN

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