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## International Environmental Crime

The total value of international environmental crime is on the order of \$20 to 40 billion a year, about 5 to 10% the size of the global drug trade.<sup>1</sup>

So what is environmental crime? In contrast to traditional predatory crime, which involves the involuntary redistribution of existing wealth through theft and robbery, etc., environmental crime involves the production and/or distribution of goods and services that are illegal by their classification. Environmental crime is economic crime where the exchange of goods is consensual, so there are rarely victims to complain of offenses.<sup>2</sup>

Brack and Hayman report that there are five broad areas of offenses recognized by bodies such as the G8, Interpol, EU, UN Environment Program and the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute. These are:

- Illegal trade in wildlife in contravention of the 1973 Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora;
- Illegal trade in ozone depleting substances in contravention of the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer;
- Dumping and illegal transport of various kinds of hazardous waste in contravention of the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and Other Wastes and their Disposal;
- Illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in contravention of controls imposed by various regional fisheries management organizations;
- Illegal logging and trade in timber when timber is harvested, transported, bought or sold in violation of national laws.<sup>3</sup>

Values along commodity chains routinely increase by at least an order of mag-

nitude and sometimes between twenty-five and fifty times.

### Some examples

- A 30 pound cylinder of colorless, odorless CFC-12 bought in China for US\$40 can be sold on the US black market for up to \$600.<sup>4</sup>
- A single rhinoceros horn can earn one destitute poacher several hundred dollars, equivalent to one year's salary in some African countries. The same horn, ground up and used as a perceived remedy for impotence and other ailments, can fetch half a million dollars in Asia.<sup>4</sup>
- An African grey parrot exported from the Ivory Coast may be worth US\$20 at the time of capture, US\$100 at the point of export, US\$600 to an importer in the U.S. or Europe and over US\$1,100 to a specialist retailer.
- Musk pods from the Siberian musk deer may be worth some US\$2 to 3 per gram to a hunter, US\$7 to 8 per gram to a Russian middle man, US\$12 to 14 per gram to a European or South Korean trader and over US\$50 per gram to the European perfume industry.<sup>5</sup>

- A Golden Lion Tamarin wholesales in Brazil for \$190, and sells for \$20,000 on the European black market.<sup>6</sup>

### It's happening worldwide

Thanks to the forces of economic globalization, contraband including CFCS, endangered species and toxic waste is flowing through national borders that are disturbingly porous. Indeed, even in the U.S. only 2% of international cargo shipments receive any inspection at all, much less a thorough search for environmental contraband

Charles Schmidt reports, "Singapore is one of the busiest transit ports in the world - nearly 40,000 containers pass through the island state every day. The country is reputed to be efficient, reliable and free of corruption, and yet it has emerged as a major hub for illegal CFCS and other environmental contraband. Why? Because transit inspections in Singapore are



minimal and because the confidentiality of private business information there is highly respected. Brokers can unload cargo, repackage it and reroute it to new destinations with minimal oversight from customs officials. Thus, transit nations provide opportunities for smugglers to disguise material origins and make paper trails harder to follow."<sup>4</sup>

Schmidt adds, "The Italian Mafia, which has successfully infiltrated Italy's industrial waste disposal sector, is thought by several experts, including the authors of *International Crime Threat Assessment*, to be heavily involved. The report states that half of Italy's processed waste disappears annually, most of it presumably dumped abroad."<sup>4</sup>

China produced a volume of halons for its "basic domestic needs" that was significantly in excess of the world market in developing countries.<sup>7</sup> In the process it has become the world's largest producer and consumer of ozone-depleting gases, such as chlorofluorocarbons, after developed countries phased them out in 1995.<sup>8</sup>

The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, already a key route for the heroin trade, is being used for a new type of smuggling - chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).<sup>9</sup>

It's not drugs that are the target of the latest anti-smuggling effort between the U.S. and Mexico, but environmentally dangerous refrigerants used in 20 million automobile air conditioners in the United States. Cars made after 1994 in the United States use a different refrigerant that doesn't harm the environment, but millions of drivers with older cars still use the banned coolants because it is very expensive to have air conditioning units overhauled to accept the safer chemicals.<sup>10</sup> Freon is smuggled across the Rio Grande in backpacks, hidden from border inspectors in the cavities of cars, and shipped north by the ton concealed in 18-wheel tractor-trailers.

## What's being done

Charles Schmidt reports, "Today, the battle against international environmental crime is waged through a system of multinational treaties addressing nearly every conceivable aspect of environmental protection. But despite their noble intents, nearly all of these hundreds of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) lack effective enforcement capacity. Many MEA member countries, especially developing countries, don't have adequate institutional and legal frameworks to enforce treaty obligations. The task of investigating and prosecuting environmental crimes in developing countries is extremely challenging. Even where

environmental laws exist, local police forces are often uneducated about environmental concerns or influenced by corrupt officials. Prosecution can also be held up by a lack of informed judges."<sup>4</sup>

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has launched Green Customs Project, which will use integrated training to teach customs officers to spot and apprehend criminals trafficking in illegal environmental commodities more easily. Until recently, everybody involved in enforcement of international agreements "had been doing things separately," says James Sniffen, UNEP information officer. "Now there is a coordinated effort among Interpol, the world Customs Organization and the secretariats for the various UNEP treaties with trade provisions," he explains.<sup>11</sup> *P&SF*

## References

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11. Bette Hillman, "Putting the Brakes on Illegal Trade," *Chemical & Engineering News*, **81** (25), 35 (23 June 2003).

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### Historic chemical names

1. What is aqua regia? Why is it named such?
2. What is muriatic acid? Where did the name come from?
3. What is sal ammoniac? How is the name derived?
4. What is aqua fortis? What is its derivation?
5. What is oil of vitriol? How did it receive that name?

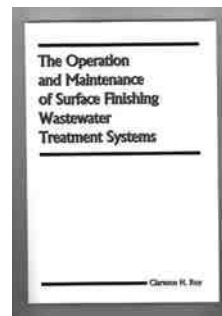
Answers on page 63.

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