

## **Home Depot says it will stop selling wood from endangered forests**

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26 August 1999

ATLANTA (AP) - In announcing a new policy banning the sale of wood from endangered areas, Home Depot chief Arthur M. Blank called on competitors to do the same.

Home Depot, the nation's largest home-improvement retailer, announced Thursday that the phase-out of sales of so-called "old-growth" wood will take effect in 2002. In addition to cutting out sales of lumber from threatened forests, Home Depot said the action also would cover the whole range of wood products, from brooms to doors.

"We need to do this so that 25 years from now we can keep going," Blank said.

"We've wanted to do this for a long time, but it takes time to make something like this work," Blank said at a news conference as the company's store managers met in conjunction with its 20th anniversary. "We used to be a voice, but now we're a force ... now we can move the needle a little bit."

Greenpeace representative Scott Paul praised the move.

"With Home Depot throwing down the gauntlet to its competitors, we now anticipate that other U.S.-based home improvement retailers will soon follow suit," he said.

Some of the endangered areas that could be covered by the ban include redwood and cedar forests in the Pacific Northwest and rain forests in South America and Southeast Asia that produce lauan, according to the Certified Forest Products Council.

The San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network and other environmental groups have held demonstrations over the last two years at several Home Depot stores. Protesters have also picketed several local zoning commission meetings where Home Depot building permits were being discussed.

"This is not in response to ... any extreme group," Blank said. "It's in response to our opportunities, and moreover our responsibilities, in this regard."

Some industry analysts had questions about the Home Depot policy.

"How are you going to make sure someone in South America is meeting the same standards as in British Columbia," said Joe Parraton, owner of a Canadian Web site that represents more than 500 forestry and wood-products companies. "Wood is practically free down there, and what do they do with those countries is going to be a big question."

Home Depot officials said sales associates will be trained in environmentally friendly alternatives to hardwood, and the company is looking to stock up on such alternatives.

Blank had a confrontation with environmentalists last year at the annual stockholder meeting, where shareholders overwhelmingly rejected a resolution that would have forced the company to stop selling old-growth wood within two years.

"From all indications, this is a great victory for the forests," said Michael Brune of Rainforest Action Network. "Home Depot is a linchpin in the industry, and if they are truly phasing out old-growth wood, I could not possibly overstate the importance of this victory."

Atlanta-based Home Depot said that while it accounts for less than 10 percent of the world's lumber sales, it is still the largest single retailer of lumber.

It has 856 stores in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and Chile and reported \$30.2 billion in total sales last year.

Blank said that the company would work with suppliers to minimize cost increases, and would absorb any initial price spikes.

In addition, the company said it is moving toward selling only wood that has been certified "responsible growth" by the Mexico

In addition, the company said it is moving toward selling only wood that has been certified "responsible growth," by the Mexico-based Forest Stewardship Council. Only 1 percent of wood currently available is certified by the group as meeting environmental, social and economic standards.