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Hackers assist illegal logging operations
Greenpeace

Hackers Responsible for Rainforest Destruction

By illegally securing transport permits for logging companies

Greenpeace [announced](#) that over 200 people and 100 logging and charcoal companies faced prosecution in Brazil for their involvement in a large-scale fraud case. The companies allegedly contracted hacking groups that broke into the government's network and altered the records in order to allow for excessive deforestation.

In their attempt to regulate deforestation, authorities from the Brazilian state of Par  introduced an online timber transport tracking system a few years ago. The idea behind the project is to control the amount of timber that can be legally transported out of the state by each company. If a company reaches its maximum allowed quota, the state stops issuing transport permits for it.

When this system was first introduced, a lot of experts and environmental groups warned that it was exposed to possible fraud in multiple ways and unfortunately their fears came true when, in April 2007, the local police started investigating hacking activity that targeted the online system. Their efforts concluded that hackers had penetrated the network and altered records in order to authorize multiple companies to secure more transport permits than allowed. The fraud was estimated at over \$830 million.

The investigators initially arrested 30 individuals suspected of orchestrating the scam, but the current list of involved parties amounts to 202 people and 107 companies. "Almost half of the companies involved in this scam have other law suits pending for environmental crimes or the use of slave labour, amongst other things," pointed out Federal Prosecutor Daniel Avelino.

"By hacking into the permit system, these companies have made their timber shipments appear legal and compliant with the forest management plans," Greenpeace campaigner Andr  Muggiati, explained how the scheme worked. "And this is only the tip of the iceberg, because the same computer system is also used in two other Brazilian states," he added.

Greenpeace warns that the Brazilian government is not only having problems regulating the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, but it actually plans to increase it by allowing every land owner to cut down trees from as much as 50 percent of their property. This means more than double of what the current law allows.

Much like Russia, China and Ukraine, Brazil is also the home of a large number of organized cyber-criminal groups that operate at global level, and which the country's government generally fails to dismantle and prosecute.