

SUSTAINABILITY

Inside the mind of Greenpeace

Greenpeace is perhaps the most well-known environmental NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) in the world. Having started in 1971 in British Columbia, Canada, the group now has a presence in 40 countries across the globe. Today Greenpeace is particularly well known within the forest products sector due in part to their numerous high profile – and often controversial – campaigns rooted in forest protection. Perini Journal recently had a wide-ranging conversation with Scott Paul, forest campaign director for Greenpeace USA.

Hugh O'Brian

Scott Paul comes across as a smart and passionate person, explaining that he has been with Greenpeace for 13 years and earlier had worked for various other environmental groups and even spent a year in the White House as part of Bill Clinton's environmental policy office. Here he explains his efforts with Greenpeace.

"FOR GREENPEACE, ONE OF OUR GREATEST COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IS OUR INTERNATIONALISM. As the United States has traditionally been the largest forest products importer in the world – from timber and plywood to pulp and paper, flooring, furniture and musical instruments – I tend to focus a lot on imports. The US imports it all, from the four corners of the globe. Greenpeace offices in consuming regions, like the US, work closely with producing regions to track product from the stump to the store shelf."

"TO STEP BACK, at a global level Greenpeace will come to agreement on the forests of the world that we consider the most important, and most endangered. Local teams in, for example, the Amazon or Indonesia or Canada spend years documenting the playing field – who's logging where, what species are sought, land ownership issues, the cultural context, etc. Globally we tend to focus in on who we consider to be the most destructive, or even illegal, operators in any given region. This information is shared across our global network and we track product, often across the globe, into the markets. It can be a very slow, tedious and time-consuming process but when we're ready to go public we are very confident with our information."

"At a certain point people like me in consuming regions end up with a file linking disreputable logging companies in one part of the world with importers, wholesalers and retailers in another. Typically we'll send out letters to identified companies, set up face-to-face meetings and basically say 'Did you know that you are buying from person who's buying from a person who is doing very bad things? I can prove it.'"

"WE LAY OUT THE EVIDENCE, SIMILAR TO A COURT OF LAW. We describe how a company's business relations are damaging the environment, or breaking laws, in a threatened forest region or perhaps even impacting human rights and then we ask: 'Do you want to be associated with these people?' The reaction will typically go one of two ways: Either they say 'thanks, we did not realize this' and we work together to fix it, or else they say 'you don't know what you are talking about, everything is fine here', and they ask us to leave."

"These days you really need to take this type of stuff seriously. Importing illegal forest products is now a crime. We've got The Lacey Act here in the US, new legislation in Europe and they're not too far off in Australia. In many cases organized criminal elements are involved. Interpol, the international police organization, is now taking environmental crime very seriously. Crime begets crime, and people involved with illegal logging, for example, are often involved with the drug trade or arms trade as well. If they knew, why would any wholesaler or retailer want to be involved with this? I am not talking about the majority of the wood and fiber on the market but this does occur and consumers have a right to know."

WHAT FOREST PRODUCT TRADE TRENDS DO YOU SEE TODAY? "Pulp interests me. If you look at the pulp markets today, things are not particularly controversial. There is guarded optimism that things are going in the right direction. In North America we have the recent Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement that is seeking consensus on over 72 million hectares of public forests licensed to 21 logging companies across the Canadian boreal. In the southern core

of South America companies seem to be moving toward more sustainable practices, or at least there are overtures in that regard. From Scandinavia to Canada to Brazil the pulp markets seem to be taking FSC seriously and are reaching out more to NGOs. I'm not saying there is not still controversy, but on a global scale it's an interesting time and I believe there is a chance to make real progress if people follow through. But of course there is always the exception."

AND THAT EXCEPTION IS? "In the pulp market the dramatic global exception is Indonesia, which is at an all-time high in terms of controversy related to deforestation, rapid land conversion and climate change. I would not be surprised if the situation only escalates in the near-term. The rate of conversion is staggering. Areas that were recently primary tropical forests are being knocked down and replaced with palm oil or fast growing species for pulp and paper."

"As a result Indonesia is now the world's third largest emitter of carbon into the atmosphere, behind only China and the US. The majority of this carbon release is due to the draining and burning of peatlands and primary tropical rainforest. Tropical peat forests have an unbelievable ability to store carbon and companies in Indonesia are draining them, burning them and establishing mono-cultural plantations. This pulp is now undercutting the prices of more responsible producers in the global market."

IS GREENPEACE AGAINST FORESTRY IN GENERAL? "No. The world needs forest products. We are by no means against the forest products business but we want to make sure that it is done in a sustainable manner. Today more carbon is released into the atmosphere due to deforestation than from the entire global transportation fleet including all cars, planes, trains, boats and buses combined. The quickest and most cost-effective thing humanity can do to decrease our collective carbon emission is to stop deforestation and ultimately begin to reestablish forests."

WHAT DO YOU WANT THE TISSUE INDUSTRY TO DO REGARDING FORESTS? "Every situation, every company is in a unique situation but it typically comes down to three basic pillars.

1. There are some places you just shouldn't source from. There are places on the planet that should be left alone. The reasons can vary from environmental, to social, to cultural. There are ways to determine if a given forest region is, or should be, classified as Endangered or as a High Conservation Value forest. Don't buy from people operating in these regions.
2. Buy from those who are acting responsibly. If you buy forest fiber, source responsibly. It's not that hard to determine if you're dealing with a company or region that requires increased due diligence on your part. Today, globally we can best quantify responsibility via FSC certification. In short, buy FSC. If you can't get enough then give a clear, serious public signal that you have a preference for it.
3. Use recycle, reclaim and alternative fibers. Ultimately seek greater efficiency."

IF YOU SENSE THAT A TISSUE COMPANY IS NOT TAKING YOUR ISSUES SERIOUSLY, HOW DO YOU APPLY PRESSURE? "The response to our research and analysis can vary greatly. Some take it seriously and start examining their supply chain and our specific accusations. There's follow up and constructive dialogue. Sincerity is typically not hard to spot. On the other hand you can tend to tell when you're talking to a brick wall, you get the 'young man I've been making this product for my whole life and there is no problem here' type response. At some point Greenpeace has to make a calculated decision about whether to pursue it or not. It's a power analysis. We have to ask ourselves if transitioning this particular company will lead to change on the ground. If the answer is 'yes' then we will launch a campaign to pressure the company to adopt a more progressive, a more sustainable procurement policy."

YOU RECENTLY RAN A CAMPAIGN AGAINST KIMBERLY-CLARK. DO YOU THINK YOU'RE MAKING PROGRESS? "We ran a campaign against K-C for almost five years and in August of 2009 we jointly announced a new procurement policy that is clearly 'best in class'. It's heartening to see how seriously the company takes the agreement. We meet periodically to discuss challenges and opportunities to implementing the policy. We like to say at Greenpeace that we have 'no permanent friends and no permanent enemies', but I have to say that I'm impressed with K-C so far. It's a good policy. They take it seriously. They should be rewarded. But for every positive example like K-C I can find 'greenwash'", where a company produces a nice sounding, sweet smelling statement that in actuality equals nothing more than status quo. This is in fact so common that there is a new wave of activism to expose hypocritical greenwash marketing."

HOW IS GREENPEACE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER NGOS? "We don't take corporate or government money. That is a

big difference from many other NGOs. It allows us to remain totally independent in our analyses. Also, we are comparatively very international in our thought and reach. We have a very intention-ally coordinated approach, so if we decide to work on a given region, Indonesia for example, we will approach the issues across many countries and continents eventually lining up our resources in a coordinated approach.

The final Greenpeace decision, however, is made by the in-country office and not someone on the other side of the planet.”

IS GREENPEACE LESS RADICAL AND MORE MAINSTREAM TODAY THAN IT HAD BEEN IN THE PAST? “No, I don’t think we have changed all that much but the issues we focus on are today more mainstream than they once were. So perhaps we are perceived as more mainstream.”

“Greenpeace essentially came out of the antiwar movement in the late 1960s and early 70s, with some of the early roots adapted from Quakers traditions. The Quaker concept of bearing witness for example teaches that if you see a crime or atrocity you have a moral obligation to not turn away, you must bear witness in order to later tell others what you saw. Another influence came from communication theorist Marshall McLuhan who was perhaps most famous for the expression ‘the medium is the message’. Tie all this together and you begin to understand Greenpeace. We bear witness by pushing the communications technological envelope, be it video, the internet, etc., to get the word out, to expose the issue.

Despite the hype we have never been anti-business or anti-capitalist. But we love exposing the bad actors in business and government. It’s our role in society. So I don’t think we have become more mainstream but perhaps we’ve never been all that radical either. It’s just the truth as we see it.” •