

Deter Timber Theft

Help Stop Timber Theft!

The theft of wood and timber seems to be on the rise. The Hawai'i Forest Industry Association is aware of investigations into illegal cutting on Kaua'i and the Big Island, and we're certain that the problem of poaching and selling stolen timber spreads across the state. We need your help to address this serious problem.

For instance, the Kona coffee processors, working together, have cut the theft rate for coffee cherry from 60 per year to five per year, simply by asking some basic questions. They also phoned each other with the license plate numbers of vehicles driven by people who didn't appear to be legitimate sellers, and insisted that payment for coffee cherry always be by check, never cash, mailed to the seller.

Law enforcement officials have endorsed a simple set of questions like the ones that follow. Members of our board of directors testify that even one or two questions to dubious sellers discourage their activities. Before you buy wood from someone you are not familiar with, ask:

1. Where, specifically, was this wood cut?
2. May I have the name, address, and phone number of the landowner of that property?
3. May I have your (the seller's) name, address, phone number, and drivers' license ID number? May I see your drivers' license?
4. What is your State GET license number?
5. Do you have a document from the landowner certifying that you have his/her permission to sell the timber?

HFIA has worked with the legislature to improve agricultural theft laws. The agricultural community is also pushing for better documentation of harvests and sales, to establish a chain-of-custody record which will protect landowners, harvesters, shippers and purchasers. We welcome your suggestions for other ways to discourage theft.

Mahalo!