



Best Practice Guide for Forensic Timber Identification



VERA RAUBER CORADIN



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THE GUIDE:

- Targets front-line officers, customs officials, crime scene investigators, scientists, prosecutors and judiciary
- Covers the whole chain of custody, from the crime scene through the forensic laboratory to the court room
- Outlines best practices and procedures for sampling and analysis of timber
- Makes reference to standard regulations and operational procedures
- Considers mechanisms for international cooperation and capacity building
- Supports timely, thorough and effective investigations

Within the framework of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) led the development of a **'Best Practice Guide for Forensic Timber Identification'**. Tackling illegal logging and trafficking of timber requires a well-coordinated and multi-faceted global approach, employing all tools and resources available, including forensic science applications. The Guide targets front-line officers, customs officials, crime scene investigators, scientists, prosecutors and judiciary. It aims to facilitate the use of forensics to the fullest extent possible, to identify timber and combat timber trafficking.

Forensic science can provide robust results, and answer certain important evidential questions regarding: genus, species, geographic provenance, age, and individual from which the evidence originates. This information can be used to:

- Identify CITES-listed timber
- Verify or refute species and/or origin declarations
- Identify whether a crime has been committed
- Support an investigation
- Enrich trend analysis
- Inform law enforcement responses

In addressing illegal logging and timber trafficking at an international level, approaches should be standardised to ensure that information can be exchanged meaningfully and that the quality of results is consistent between jurisdictions. The 'Best Practice Guide for Forensic Timber Identification' provides information on appropriate methods and procedures that should be used throughout the entire investigation process, from crime scene management and sample collection to laboratory analysis, interpretation of results and data handling. The information contained in the Guide will provide direction and support to tackle the problem of illegal logging, mislabelling of timber, and the smuggling of timber products.

A Law Enforcement Best Practice Flow Diagram for Timber has been developed to accompany the Guide. The purpose of the flow diagram is to lead front-line officers through the steps that should be completed when dealing with a load or shipment containing timber that is passing through a checkpoint such as an international border crossing. An online version of this flow diagram that includes dynamic links to additional resources can be accessed at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/Wildlife/Flow_Diagram_Timber.pdf

COMPONENTS OF THE GUIDE

The Guide is divided into four parts containing information specific to different audiences. These parts are collectively intended to provide integrated tools for gathering and processing evidence on timber crime and performing laboratory analysis in support of prosecution and for intelligence purposes.

Part I provides information for national agencies and individuals responsible for law enforcement. It describes initial risk analysis and search guidelines for front-line officers. It advises on options for rapid-field identification and formulation of forensic questions. Guidance is provided on the collection and preservation of evidence, maintaining the chain of custody, including when transporting samples to the laboratory. It also advises on communication with the timber identification service provider.

Part II is aimed at scientists undertaking forensic identification tests or those who seek to do so in the future. The various methods of timber identification are summarized as an introduction to the associated disciplines. Resources for acquiring reference material and data are presented, and guidance is provided regarding laboratory procedural requirements for undertaking forensic work. It also advises on communication between scientists and law enforcement authorities, and on the presentation of scientific results by an expert witness in court.

Part III is aimed at law enforcement officials, prosecutors and the judiciary. It is focused on appropriate considerations when preparing a case on illegal timber trade for court. To facilitate understanding of identification methods and analyses results by the prosecution and judiciary, simple descriptions of the relevant methods are provided. Key forensic requirements and specific legal considerations regarding the use of forensic timber identification services are discussed, and a final checklist is presented.

Part IV discusses the importance of international cooperation to tackle timber crime. It covers relevant international legal frameworks, which form the basis for regulation and for cooperation between countries including the exchange of information and mutual assistance to tackle transnational organized crime. Information is provided on networks, mechanisms and tools available for countries and individuals seeking to obtain legal or scientific assistance from another country. It outlines some of the benefits, challenges and opportunities to improve cooperation, communication and collaboration internationally among and between legal and scientific communities.

Under the umbrella of ICCWC, the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO) are working together to bring coordinated support to wildlife law enforcement agencies and networks at national, regional and global levels to enhance global cooperation and capacity to combat wildlife and forest crimes.



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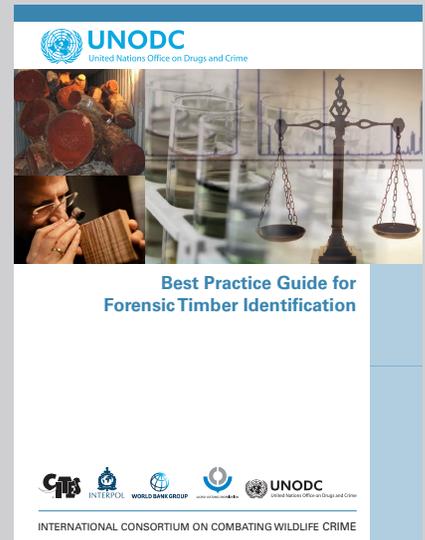


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For more information, please download the Timber Guide: https://www.unodc.org/documents/Wildlife/Guide_Timber.pdf

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