



Market analysis, barbecue charcoal 2017

Destroying forests for the barbecue

Contents

- How unhealthy is barbecuing using charcoal obtained through over-exploitation?[33](#)
- What did the market analysis bring to light?[33](#)
- The results in detail.....[44](#)
- Assessment summary [1111](#)
- Why is no-one doing anything about this environmental sacrilege? [1212](#)
- Where does our barbecue charcoal actually come from? [1212](#)
- It is worth purchasing certified products?.....[1313](#)
- What does the WWF recommend?[1313](#)
- Contact:..... [1414](#)

How unhealthy is barbecuing using charcoal obtained through over-exploitation?

For millions of people living in Germany, barbecuing is a regular ritual during the warm summer months. The most popular barbecuing method is still the classic charcoal grill. However, most people are unaware that the charcoal used often comes from dubious sources in Eastern Europe or even the tropics, and is one of the factors responsible for deforestation and the resulting threat to many species of flora and fauna and the acceleration of catastrophic climate change.

The charcoal industry is omitting to inform the public how much destruction it is causing, labelling its paper sacks with slogans such as “sustainably cultivated”, “ecological production”, “from sustainably managed forests”, or “for the love of nature”. Scandalous top performer when it comes to misleading consumers: in one product, labelled “no tropical wood”, the laboratory found nothing but tropical wood.

In summary: The WWF has discovered “more lies than truth” in the market analysis it has conducted this year on wood. The anomalies are not healthy for our planet - and therefore not healthy for us all!

What did the market analysis bring to light?

The results of the market analysis are disconcerting. The WWF tested 20 products from petrol stations, discount shops and DIY centres. With 80 percent of the products, there were differences or considerable risks, such as non-declared tropical wood without a forest or legality certificate or from threatened tree species that are on the Red List of endangered species (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>). The differences range from false information about the types of wood used to environmental promises that are impossible to keep.

The results in detail

Image	Purchased at	Name of product	Analysis result	Certificate	Manufacturer	Decl. woods	Decl. production	Decl. origin of the woods
	Aldi	Grill-Time; Grill charcoal briquettes; 3 kg;	Birch, white oak, birch, hornbeam, robinia	DIN	Gryfskand Sp. zoo.	No information provided	PL	No information provided
	Aldi	Grill-Time; Grill charcoal briquettes; 3 kg; Re-purchase of suspicious product	High risk of wood obtained through over-exploitation, since the product also contains woods that are common in tropical and sub-tropical areas.	DIN	IB Holzkohle Vertriebsgesellschaft mbH Plan 6, D-Hamburg Hergestellt: 2017	No information provided	PL	No information provided

	<p>Bauhaus AG</p>	<p>flash - 3 kg wood charcoal ("Lumpwood"); produced in 2016</p>	<p>High risk of wood obtained through over-exploitation, since the product contains only woods that are common in tropical and sub-tropical areas. Includes one type of wood that is included in the red list of endangered species. Extreme deviation from the environmental information</p>	<p>DIN</p>	<p>boomex GmbH; Essen</p>	<p>"No tropical wood"</p>	<p>No information provided</p>	<p>No information provided</p>
	<p>Bauhaus AG</p>	<p>LotusGrill</p>	<p>The manufacturer promises beech. While the product contains mainly beech, it also contains white oak</p>		<p>LotusGrill GmbH; Limburgerhof</p>	<p>Beech barbecue charcoal; Produced from: beech</p>	<p>Poland</p>	<p>No information provided</p>
	<p>EDEKA</p>	<p>Edeka - Beech barbecue charcoal</p>	<p>The manufacturer promises 100% beech. While the product contains mainly beech, it also contains white oak and types of maple. There are also differences with regard to the types of wood permitted in the FSC database (maple)</p>	<p>FSC DIN</p>	<p>Produced by GRYFSKAND Sp zoo; Poland for EDEKA</p>	<p>100 % beech; from deciduous European trees</p>	<p>Poland</p>	<p>No information provided</p>

	Hellweg	MAX; 3 kg; premium wood charcoal; Kohlen Union B. Schönbucher GmbH	High risk of wood obtained through over-exploitation, since the product contains only woods that are common in tropical and sub-tropical areas.	DIN		Deciduous wood	No information provided	No information provided
	Hellweg	Barbecue charcoal; TOPO Accente GmbH & Co. KG; Hamburg Produced in 2017;	The producer promises that the charcoal originates from oak, hornbeam, beech and ash. However, the product also contains maple and elm. There are certain types of elm that are included on the red list with an endangered status.	DIN		Oak, hornbeam, beech, ash	No information provided	No information provided
	Hellweg	Weber wood charcoal	The following were identified: ash, lime, birch, white oak, hornbeam, poplar and elm. There are certain types of elm that are included on the red list with an endangered status. There are also differences with regard to the types of wood permitted in the FSC database	FSC	Weber	No information provided	Made in Poland	No information provided

	Hellweg	<p>Rothmann Grill charcoal briquettes; 7 kg;</p> <p>Produced for Hellweg, die Profi- baumärkte GmbH & Co. KG</p>	<p>High risk of wood obtained through over-exploitation, since the product contains only woods that are common in tropical and sub-tropical areas.</p>	DIN		From de- ciduous wood charcoal	No infor- mation provided	No infor- mation provided
	Online	Thüros	<p>Among the types of wood iden- tified, white oak, maple, horn- beam and elm, there are differ- ences with regard to the types of wood promised on the Inter- net.</p> <p>There are certain types of elm that are included on the red list with an endangered status.</p>	DIN	Thüros	Deciduous hardwood charcoal <i>Online: premium wood charcoal made of oak, beech and alder)</i>	Made in Germany	No infor- mation provided
	Lidl	<p>Flammenco quality bar- becue char- coal</p> <p>DHG Ver- triebs- und Consult- ingges. mbH; Kempen</p>	<p>Beech, white oak, hornbeam and white beech were identi- fied</p> <p>High risk of wood obtained through over-exploitation, since the product also contains woods that are common in tropical and sub-tropical areas.</p>			No infor- mation provided	No infor- mation provided	No infor- mation provided

	Lidl	<p>Grill-Meister; Grill-Holzkohle; DHG Vertriebs- und Consulting-ges. mbH; Kempen Produced in 2017</p>	<p>Identified wood types: Birch, white oak, hornbeam</p> <p>There are differences with regard to the types of wood permitted in the FSC database</p>	FSC		No information provided	No information provided	No information provided
	Netto	<p>Best of BBQ; barbecue charcoal briquettes; 3 kg</p>	<p>Identified wood types: beech, birch, alder, white oak, hornbeam, poplar</p> <p>There are differences with regard to the types of wood permitted in the FSC database (hornbeam, poplar)</p>	FSC DIN	<p>Produced for Cavelli GmbH; Worms</p> <p>License number: GRYF-SKAND Sp zoo; Poland</p>	No information provided	Poland	No information provided
	Penny	<p>Grill Country; barbecue charcoal; 3 kg; Grill Country Vertriebsgesellschaft</p>	<p>Identified wood types: ash, lime, maple</p>		Grill-Country Vertriebsgesellschaft mbH; Uslar	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided

	Penny	Grill Country; barbecue charcoal briquettes; 3 kg; Grill Country Vertriebsgesellschaft	Identified wood types: birch, pine, spruce, larch	DIN	Grill-Country Vertriebsgesellschaft mbH; Uslar	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided
	Real	Grill profi; charcoal	High risk, since the product contains only woods that are common in tropical and subtropical areas. Additionally: Bongossi was also identified, a type included on the red list with an endangered status.	DIN		Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided
	Real	Real; beech barbecue charcoal briquettes	Mainly beech was identified, but also lime, maple, birch, which contradicts the manufacturer's promises. There are also differences with regard to the types of wood permitted in the FSC database	DIN FSC	Produced for Real	100% beechwood	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided

	Real	ProFagus; 3 kg; GRILLIS; barbecue charcoal briquettes	Mainly beech was identified, but also lime and maple were found, which contradicts the manufacturer's promises.	TÜV PEFC DIN	proFagus GmbH; Bodenfelde	Beech	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided
	Shell	Barbecue charcoal; 2.5 kg; from managed forests	High risk, since the product contains only woods that are common in tropical and sub-tropical areas.	DIN-EN-1860-2	Holzkohlewerk Lüneburg	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided
	Shell	Echte Grill KETTS, barbecue charcoal briquettes; 3 kg;	High risk, since the product contains only woods that are common in tropical and sub-tropical areas.		Holzkohlewerk Lüneburg	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided	Unfortunately no info provided

Assessment summary

	Number	As percentage
Number of products tested	20	100
Difference from declared woods or increased risks among tested products<	17	85
Tropical wood in tested products	8	40
Products that contained types on the “red list”	5	25
No information on the packaging	11	55
Difference from statements made on the package	5	56
Non-certified products	14	70
Certified products	6	30
FSC-certified products	5	25
PEFC-certified products	1	5
Deviation from the FSC database	5	100
Deviation from the PEFC database	Stated wood types not publicised	-

Why is no-one doing anything about this environmental sacrilege?

Despite the well-known fact that fauna and flora species are dying out, and that deforestation is linked to the overheating of the climate, a large proportion of our barbecue charcoal still comes from dubious sources. The charcoal industry is clearly continuing to use cheap raw materials, regardless of how much this contributes to the risk of environmental destruction. In legal terms, they don't have to worry, since the European Timber Regulation (EUTR), which came into force in 2013 with the aim of stopping trade of illegal wood and paper products on the European market, has loopholes. This is also true of barbecue charcoal, since this is not even covered by the regulation. It transpired when the Ministry for Agriculture (BMEL) was contacted that several products were simply forgotten when the EUTR was passed. As a result, the responsible agency for EUTR control, the BLE (the German Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food) has no power to enforce EUTR checks. Charcoal cannot be monitored. The companies who sell it on the market are also not obliged, as stipulated by the EUTR, to know what types of wood are used and where they come from, and they are also not required to ensure the legality of the product.

Where does our barbecue charcoal actually come from?

Germany is the largest consumer of charcoal in the EU, with 250,000 tonnes. However, charcoal almost always comes from abroad, such as from Poland, Paraguay, Nigeria or Ukraine.

Since Poland imports a large quantity of charcoal from Nigeria and Paraguay itself, it must be assumed that the proportion of barbecue charcoal containing tropical wood is higher than the direct imports suggest. This is confirmed by the WWF's market analysis: 40 percent of the charcoal tested came from tropical or sub-tropical regions.

Nigeria and Paraguay are classified as countries with a high deforestation rate, which always entails the destruction of species and the exacerbation of climate overheating, since huge quantities of CO₂ are released as a result of deforestation. Additionally, corruption is rife in many of the producer countries. Nigeria is ranked 136th and Paraguay 123rd among the most corrupt countries in the world, according to the Transparency International corruption index.

In Paraguay, over-exploitation of natural resources is occurring due to the rapid logging of the Gran Chaco tropical forest. The goal is to create agricultural areas. The felled trees are processed into cheap charcoal. Due to the release of CO₂ alone, which occurs as a result of the massive scale of deforestation, charcoal of this type can never be environmentally friendly. As early as 2008, the WWF published a report on illegal wood in Germany. In the report, the problems and connections between over-exploitation in

Nigeria, Paraguay and the charcoal imports are clearly described (<http://www.wwf.de/eu-importiert-illegales-holz/>; “Illegaler Holzeinschlag und Deutschland; Eine Analyse der Außenhandelsdaten April 2008” - “Illegal logging and Germany; an analysis of foreign trade data, April 2008”; WWF Germany, April 2008).

However, only a small proportion of the charcoal that contains local tree species also comes from Germany. To a far greater extent, it originates in Eastern Europe, such as Ukraine. A country that also has problems with corruption (131st place on the TI corruption index), as well as acute problems with illegal logging.

It is therefore not at all easy to avoid damaging the environment when you heat up your barbecue.

It is worth purchasing certified products?

For its market analysis, the WWF examined both non-certified and certified charcoal products (FSC and PEFC certificate). There were deviations among all products tested which had a certificate, whereby the FSC is regarded as being the more stringent certificate overall among environmental organisations. In all cases, the deviations identified are unacceptable!

The FSC and PEFC certificates suggest to the customer that the wood used in these products originates from forests that have been environmentally sensitively managed. Whether this statement can be put into practice depends on several factors. These include strict forest management standards as well as regular monitoring. In just the same way as for products that are covered by the EUTR, for certified products, the stated information on the type and origin of the wood must be correct as a minimum standard. However, this was not the case for the products examined in this analysis.

Fortunately, the FSC has recognised the problem and is in the process of inspecting all certificates relating to charcoal. A series of sanctions have already been imposed, and certificates have been withdrawn. Future market tests will show how effective these efforts are.

What does the WWF recommend?

Consumers:

- Buyers who still want to use charcoal on their barbecue should opt for FSC-certified charcoal - despite the problems ascertained among certified products. While there are deviations according to our analysis, in contrast to the many non-certified products, they at least do not use tropical wood.

- A more environmentally friendly alternative is to use an electricity- or gas-heated barbecue.

Dealers:

- Transparency: Dealers must guarantee that the information given on the packaging regarding the type and origin of the wood is correct.
- FSC certification: Despite the deviations that emerged during the market analysis by the WWF, the FSC remains the most stringent quality seal on the market.
- Regular inspection of goods using forensic methods

Policy:

- The German federal government must take action to ensure that all wood and paper products are covered by the EUTR, the European Timber Regulation, so that finally, such risk-prone product groups as charcoal can also be monitored. This would oblige those who sell charcoal on the market to know what wood the charcoal contains, and where it comes from.
- The EU authorities responsible must conduct more checks. In Germany, this is the Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food (BLE), which in the view of the WWF has not been rigorous enough in this regard in the past.
- The sanctions for infringement of the EUTR must be made considerably more severe. To date, only fines of a few hundred euros have been imposed - if at all. This is hardly going to have a deterrent effect.

Certification organisations

- Regular inspection of products from certified companies using forensic methods

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