

Scientists and NGOs: Deforestation and Degradation Responsible for Approximately 15 Percent of Global Warming Emissions

As Fossil Fuel Emissions Rise, Deforestation Makes Up Smaller Percent,
Still Significant Problem

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Scientists and non-governmental organizations at the U.N. climate negotiations commented today on the percentage of global warming emissions that is due to tropical deforestation, in light of a new analysis published earlier this week in *Nature Geoscience*. The group, which included most of the leading experts on deforestation emissions, released the following statement:

‘The new paper and other papers and IPCC reports published in the last few years, lead us to conclude that the percentage of global emissions of CO₂ from deforestation and forest degradation is less than the commonly used figure of “about 20%”. The best current estimate would be about 15% if peat degradation is included. Given the uncertainties involved one can not rely on estimates to the nearest 1%.

The change in the estimate is due to several factors, including increases in fossil fuel emissions as well as revision of the estimates of deforestation emissions, due to new data and scientific analyses. The change is NOT due to a decrease in deforestation since the 1990s, and in fact the analyses agree that global deforestation in the early 2000s has been similar to that in the 1990s. So, this new estimate is NOT a sign of progress.

This figure includes deforestation, forest degradation, and peat emissions from deforestation and degradation (including later decomposition and fires in peat from previously deforested areas).

These changes and the new paper are typical of how science advances, and reflect our improved ability to measure the emissions due to deforestation. They reinforce the point that reducing emissions from tropical deforestation is critical to slowing global warming. These emissions are comparable to the emissions of all of the European Union, and are greater than those of all cars, trucks, planes, ships and trains worldwide.

Reducing tropical forest emissions remains a relatively cost-effective option to reduce emissions. We would highlight some important lines from the new paper:

‘...reducing fossil fuel emissions remains the key element for stabilizing atmospheric CO₂ concentrations. Nevertheless, efforts to mitigate emissions from tropical forests and peatlands, and maintain existing terrestrial carbon stocks, remain critical....’”

The scientists and organizations endorsing the statement were:

BirdLife International
Conservation International
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Investigations Agency
Natural Resources Defense Council
Rainforest Action Network
Sierra Club
The Nature Conservancy
World Vision International
World Wildlife Fund – International
Union of Concerned Scientists

Frédéric Achard, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission
Pep Canadell, Australian National University
Ruth DeFries, Columbia University
Tim Herzog, World Resources Institute
Richard Houghton, Woods Hole Research Center
Douglas Morton, NASA
Guido van der Werf, Free University, Amsterdam

(Scientists' affiliations are listed for identification purposes only, and do not indicate institutional endorsement of this statement.)

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