Introduction

At AstraZeneca, health is our business and our contribution to society. We are taking action across our three pillars of sustainability – access to healthcare, environmental protection and ethics and transparency – because we recognise the strong connection between a healthy planet and healthy people. Our ambition is to demonstrate global leadership to proactively manage our environmental impact across all our activities and products. We recognise that some of our existing activities may contribute to deforestation and that we have a critical role to play in transitioning to a circular bioeconomy where we put nature and responsible sourcing at the heart of everything we do. This is why we are taking proactive measures – from our AZ Forest initiative, to our sustainable packaging efforts, to collaborating with industry on raw materials sustainability challenges – to ensure that forests remain the lifeblood of the world’s ecosystems.

Impact on health

Health is key to a thriving society. Healthcare is our core business and at the heart of all we do. Over the past two decades, there is growing scientific evidence that deforestation creates the conditions for a range of infectious diseases to spread from animals that live in cleared forests to people.\(^1\) Additionally, deforestation destroys the plants and animals that underpin critical ecosystem services and natural capital compromising sustainable and resilient economics and societal health.

Our reforestation commitment: AZ Forest

Forest loss and damage is the cause of around 10% of global warming.\(^2\) As we work to tackle climate change through our Ambition Zero Carbon programme, we have also committed to a 50 million tree reforestation initiative through to 2025.

In partnership with local governments and One Tree Planted, a not-for-profit organisation focused on global reforestation, the first trees went into the ground in Australia in February 2020, with other countries to follow. In addition, our employees worldwide are engaging in tree planting events and they were the inspiration for our company-wide reforestation commitment. Our goal through the AZ Forest initiative is that by making smarter business decisions to reduce deforestation, we can ensure healthy forest ecosystems for generations to come.

Deforestation and human rights

Deforestation can not only negatively impact the environment, but also the rights of indigenous peoples. Forest clearing frequently results in violence and intimidation with devastating impacts to families.\(^3\) This stands in stark contrast to our Human Rights Statement, so it is our aim to understand and address any negative impacts our supply chain may be causing as a result of deforestation.

AstraZeneca has committed to planting 50 million trees by 2025
AstraZeneca’s impact on deforestation

We focus on five key commodities: timber products, cattle products, palm oil, rubber, and soy because these materials are responsible for the largest share of commercial tropical and sub-tropical deforestation. To make smarter business and sourcing decisions to positively impact the planet, it is important to understand how and where these materials are used in our supply chain.

Timber products

AstraZeneca uses timber products in both our secondary and tertiary packaging.

• We use roughly 18,000 metric tonnes of secondary paper packaging, such as leaflets and cartons, globally in our own operations. Where possible, we look for innovative ways to save on paper packaging, such as e-labeling. E-labeling will bring significant transformation to the way we make product information available to healthcare professionals and patients.

• We use roughly 7,000 metric tonnes of tertiary packaging, such as cardboard, globally in our own operations. We have made a commitment to achieve 95% sustainable paper in secondary and tertiary packaging by 2022. This includes working with suppliers that can provide Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), or Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) supply chain assurances of our end products. We regularly assess our supply chain to ensure it meets these standards.

Other wood is used in pallets and construction. Pallet consumption is around 400,000 units per year. We are continually looking for ways to reduce, recycle and reuse as part of our waste reduction efforts through implementation of pallet pooling or pallet buy-back and reuse programmes.

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Cattle products

Extensive cattle ranching is the number one cause of deforestation in virtually every Amazon country, and it accounts for 80% of current deforestation.\(^4\)

• Gelatin, an inactive ingredient in some of our medicines, is largely a by-product of the beef and leather industries. We source roughly one to two metric tonnes of gelatin annually.

• Lactose, a more common inactive ingredient, is used to enable tablet formation due to its compressibility properties. We source nearly 1,000 metric tonnes of various forms of lactose annually. The lactose that we source originates from the United States and Europe and is not associated with deforestation in the Amazon.

Palm oil derivatives

Our medicines rely on palm oil derivatives and can contain raw materials, such as magnesium stearate, stearic acid, propylene glycol, glycerol, and citric acid. Magnesium stearate is our largest raw material by volume – we source roughly 80 metric tonnes annually – although the amount we use fluctuates, depending on demand for our various medicines. The remaining raw materials are used to a lesser degree. All of our magnesium stearate suppliers are members of the Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

Additionally, we use small amounts of carnauba wax as a tablet coating. Carnauba wax, while harvested from the leaves of a Carnauba palm, is not the same as palm oil. It is only grown in northeastern Brazil.
The palm leaves are cut, dried, and the wax is then obtained from a film powder that coats the leaves. After cutting, the trees then continue to grow new leaves until the next harvest.

We understand that there are human rights implications associated with the use of Carnauba wax and through the Pharmaceutical Supply Chain Initiative, AstraZeneca is working to understand actions our industry can take to drive changes in the supply chain in Brazil. While AstraZeneca only sources small amounts of this material, and a fraction of global usage across all industries, we aim to hold high ethical standards to source responsibly.

Rubber

Rubber is used in packaging and devices, such as bottle stoppers on medicine vials and plungers in syringes, respectively. In total, we use approximately 165 metric tonnes of rubber annually for these uses.

Additionally, latex rubber gloves are widely used in our laboratories. We are creating a culture of sustainability in the labs by working towards the Green Lab certification across six of our research sites, in partnership with the not-for-profit organisation, My Green Lab. Through the programme and My Green Lab certification process, scientists learn, challenge and assess our lab practices with respect to waste, energy, water and chemicals, so we can continuously improve our environmental footprint. The efforts to recycle bio-waste and plastics in our laboratories includes rubber latex glove recycling.

Soy

We do not have any direct derivatives of soy in our products.

Other biodiversity efforts

Although our land holdings are relatively small, we manage our sites to support sustainable ecosystems and encourage wildlife for the benefit of our employees and local communities. We actively support the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and we continue to apply best practice, actively managing biodiversity on our sites through local biodiversity action plans.

These plans set out locally specific actions to conserve and enhance native habitats, create and maintain refuges for flora and fauna, and preserve links with the surrounding environment via green corridors of uninterrupted habitat. We have assessed our potential local biodiversity impacts at all of our major sites. As a result, many of our sites have bespoke biodiversity action plans, including all major fully operating sites over five hectares. Additionally, the Wildlife Habitat Council has provided independent evaluation and accreditation of our site biodiversity actions plans.

Commitment to stakeholder engagement

As with all sustainability efforts, we are committed to doing the right thing. We will continue to play an active role to improve responsible sourcing efforts in our industry and work with stakeholders in the communities in which we operate to find solutions to deforestation.

References

1 - National Geographic, Deforestation Leading to More Infectious Diseases in Humans, 2019
2 - World Wildlife Fund, The Effects of Deforestation, 2020
3 - Human Rights Watch, Rainforest Mafias: How Violence and Impunity Fuel Deforestation in Brazil’s Amazon, 2019
4 - World Wildlife Fund, Unsustainable Cattle Ranching, 2020

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