

# Environmental Crime

From blind spot to business risk

## A briefing for CEOs

June 2026

### Key messages

- Environmental crime is a fast-growing illicit economy estimated at approximately USD 300 billion<sup>1</sup> and embedded in global supply chains and financial systems.
- The consequences for business are increasingly financial and operational, including market exclusion, enforcement action and disruption.
- Regulation and enforcement are tightening, making illegal goods and financial flows harder to conceal.
- Environmental crime is also degrading ecosystems, increasing supply costs, volatility and price instability.
- Exposure is widespread but control is concentrated at key chokepoints - finance, manufacturing and transport.
- Businesses that act early can protect market access, strengthen resilience and maintain access to capital; those that delay face increased costs, liability and market exclusion.

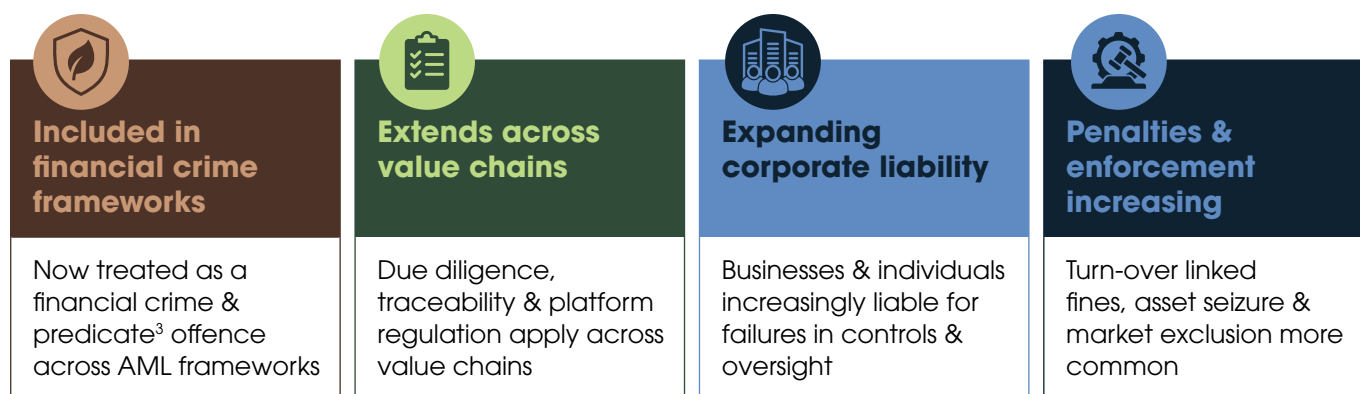
### Why this matters now

Environmental crime refers to unlawful actions that directly damage the environment.<sup>2</sup> This includes illegal activities related to fishing, land use conversion, logging, mining, pollution, waste and wildlife trade, as well as associated illegal goods, proceeds and enabling activities moving through supply chains, transport and financial systems. It is increasingly incorporated into financial crime, trade and corporate liability frameworks, creating growing exposure to anti-money laundering (AML) enforcement, product seizures, fines and market exclusion (Figure 1).

This means:

- **Exposure is pervasive across value chains**, with risks arising through sourcing, manufacturing, transport, retail and financing roles.
- **Market access is increasingly contingent on legality**, with failure leading to exclusion, seizure or contract loss in regulated markets.
- **Detection risk is rising**, as traceability, enforcement and disclosure systems strengthen.

**Figure 1. Regulatory approaches are shifting from conservation-focused enforcement towards broader financial crime, liability and market access obligations.**



1 UNEP and INTERPOL. 2016. The Rise of Environmental Crime - A Growing Threat To Natural Resources Peace, Development And Security. Available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/items/f1e192f5-8879-4e06-9d13-92d44392ebb6>

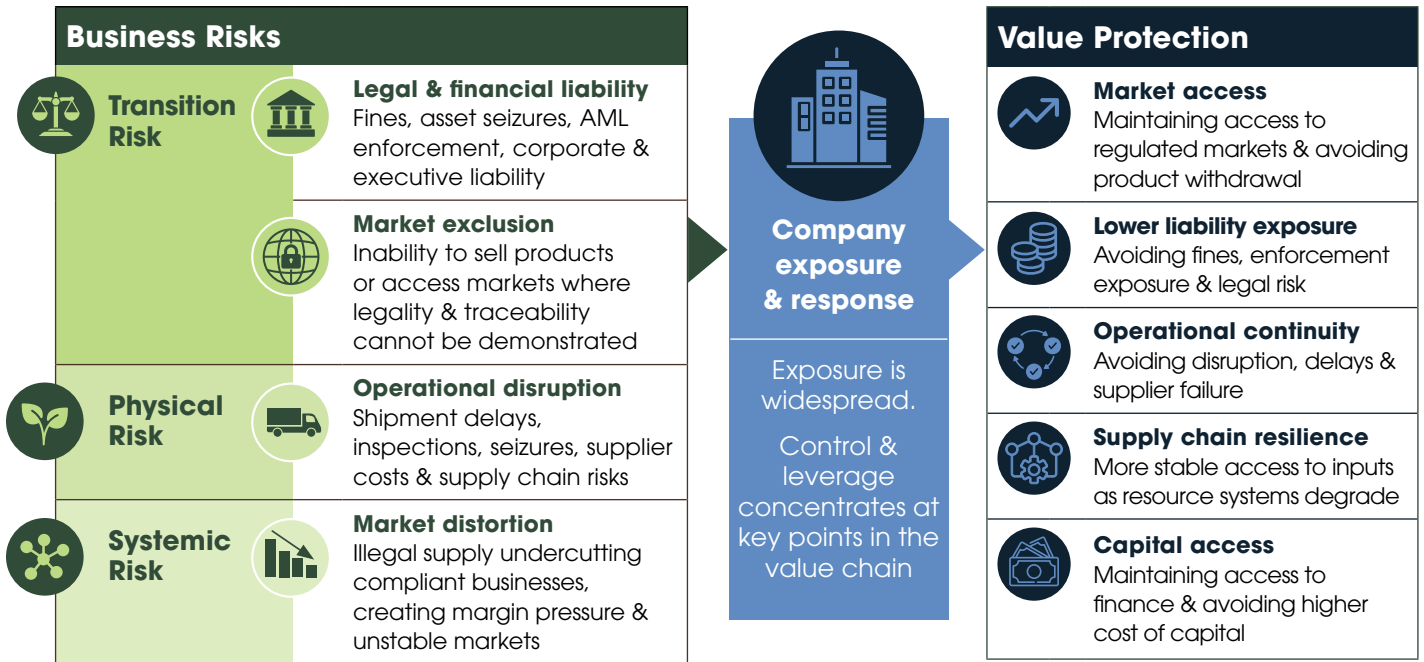
2 Environmental Investigation Agency (2008) Environmental crime: A threat to our future; FATF (2021) Money Laundering from Environmental Crime. Available at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/NGO/EIA\\_Ecocrime\\_report\\_0908\\_final\\_draft\\_low.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/NGO/EIA_Ecocrime_report_0908_final_draft_low.pdf)

3 Crimes that generate proceeds which may subsequently be subject to money laundering. Environmental crimes can be treated as predicate offences to money laundering.

## From risk to value protection

Risks arise across transition, physical and systemic dimensions, translating into revenue loss, liability, disruption and reduced access to markets and capital. These risks are already significant and increasing. A gap is emerging between businesses that integrate environmental crime into core systems and those that respond only when required. Effective management can support stronger market positioning, business resilience and access to capital (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Environmental crime, from risk to resilience**



Source: Authors, based on synthesis of FATF 2021, UNEP-INTERPOL 2016, WWF & Themis 2024 & 2026, UNODC 2025 & 2026 and related literature

## The leadership choice

A two-speed market is emerging: companies that act maintain market access, reduce disruption and strengthen resilience; those that do not face higher costs, exclusion and escalating scrutiny. Figure 3 outlines priorities for CEOs.

**Figure 3. Priorities for action on environmental crime**



Source: Authors based on WWF & Themis (2026)

Environmental crime cannot be controlled. Businesses that act early will be better placed to maintain market access, reduce disruption and liability, strengthen supply resilience and protect access to capital.

For further information, see United for Wildlife (2026) Environmental Crime: From blind spot to business risk. Prepared for United for Wildlife, a programme of The Royal Foundation by Globalbalance and Chronos Sustainability. June 2026.

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