

Amazon Greenpeace standoff ends

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SAO PAULO, Brazil --

Eight Greenpeace members prevented from leaving an Amazon town for more than 24 hours by loggers and angry residents were escorted away peacefully Wednesday by authorities.

The activists, however, were unable to depart with the scorched tree trunk they wanted to take with them for an exhibit on global warming in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, said Greenpeace campaigner Andre Muggiati.

The standoff began Tuesday when loggers and residents used trucks to prevent the Greenpeace activists from leaving the area with the fallen tree trunk, Muggiati said. They were reportedly angry the activists were removing the trunk without the community's permission.

The Greenpeace members spent a day and a night holed up under police protection in the makeshift headquarters of the federal environmental agency in the town of Castelo dos Sonhos.

Negotiations for their departure started Wednesday after the loggers sent a committee to meet with the environmentalists, said Marcelo Marquesini, who led the Greenpeace expedition.

The federal environmental agency Ibama gave Greenpeace the OK to transport the tree trunk, but the permission was suspended in a bid to end the standoff, activists said.

On Wednesday evening, the activists left the town safely escorted by a police. The town is in Para state, which forms part of the so-called "arc of destruction" where the rain forest has been devastated by loggers. In 2005, U.S. missionary Dorothy Stang was shot dead in the region during a land dispute.

The newspaper Jornal Provincia do Tapajos said residents were upset Greenpeace was allowed to remove the trunk without the community's permission and the authorizations required of loggers.

"How can Ibama allow Greenpeace to do this type of extraction when they're not even capable of approving our management plans?" community leader Vilson Ketterman told the newspaper.

He was referring to plans loggers must file to show their operations meet environmental standards.

