
Huge seizures of 190 tonnes of counterfeit pesticides

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Europol have supported the massive 12-day international operation Silver Axe, during which 350 inspections of containers were carried out at major ports and airports in seven countries. As a result, law enforcement agencies from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and the Netherlands discovered 190 tonnes of illegal or counterfeit pesticides.

One hundred cases of infringements^[1] were also detected, which led to the initiation of further investigations by the authorities, seven of which are still ongoing.

"This is another example of efficient borderless policing encouraged and supported by Europol. Alongside its partners, our agency works with a zero-tolerance policy against criminals who choose to endanger the lives of EU citizens. These huge seizures of hazardous substances, and the considerable number of investigations initiated, are the result of continuously developing cooperation between the European law enforcement community and the private sector," said Wil van Gemert, Europol's Deputy Director of Operations.

Operation Silver Axe focused on the sale and placing on the market (imports) of counterfeit pesticides, including infringements of intellectual property rights such as trademarks, patents and copyright, as well as targeting the illegal trade of pesticides.

Throughout the operation, which started on 16 November and ended on 27 November 2015, Europol's experts exchanged and analysed data among participating countries, and liaised with rights holders from the private sector.

Cooperation with private industry remains crucial and was key to this successful operation. CropLife International, the European Crop Protection Association ECPA and the European Crop Care Association ECCA, representing the plant protection industry, participated in the preparation phase as well as during the operation.

Pesticides are one of the most regulated products in the world today, and can only be traded and used in the EU if the products are proven safe and authorised.

"Plant protection products play a vital role in ensuring a safe and sustainable supply of food on the table of European consumers. Following the European Commission report of 2015, stating that illegal and counterfeit pesticides are present at an average of 10% in the EU, we very much welcome the opportunity to have taken part in such an important operation, and look forward to future collaboration with Europol and other EU authorities to put an end to the trade in counterfeit and illegal pesticides," said Jean-Charles Bocquet, Director General of the European Crop Protection Association.

"The result of this operation emphasises the need to tackle the trade in illegal pesticides, and strengthens ECCA's determination and commitment to this effective partnership with the European enforcement agencies," said ECCA's President Garth Drury.

Operation Silver Axe was organised in line with the EU Action Plan on the enforcement of intellectual property rights, and was financially supported with an EU granted budget.

[1] Cases of infringements include: Counterfeit pesticides (e.g. IP infringements/non-genuine products), illicit pesticides (e.g. unknown products potentially containing unauthorised chemicals) or false declarations (e.g. transporting dangerous goods).

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