

OC-SCAN POLICY BRIEF

Growth in the trade in counterfeit and other illegal pesticides across Europe

The global revenues associated with the trade in counterfeit and other illegal pesticides are estimated at more than 4.4 billion Euros per annum. The illegal trade in pesticides represents over 10 per cent of the total worldwide market, which has an end-user value of 44 billion Euros. To varying degrees, the use of illegal pesticides has been detected across Europe. In North East Europe, a region particularly targeted by the criminal networks involved in this activity, more than 25 per cent of the pesticides in circulation in some European Union (EU) Member States are estimated to originate from the illegal pesticide trade. However, most European countries with a large agricultural sector are affected by this threat.



Destruction of maize crops in several EU MS in 2004, due to the use of illegal pesticides with a harmful composition of sulfonylurea derivatives.

The key findings of this notice are:

- Recently, there has been a significant increase in the market for illegal and counterfeit pesticides, due to the exceptional 'low risk - high profit' margin associated with this activity. The lack of harmonisation in legislation and implementation concerning the trade in illegal pesticides serves as a key facilitator.
- The trade in illegal and counterfeit pesticides is orchestrated by highly sophisticated criminal networks that have developed complex global supply chains and exploit legal companies to camouflage their activities.
- In addition to the significant risks to crops throughout the EU, illegal pesticides tend to contain toxic substances that pose a severe threat to the environment and health.
- Due to the lack of traceability, illegal pesticides are especially at risk of being used as precursors for Home Made Explosives (HME).

Europol's recommendations based on the analysis are:

- Development of a comprehensive picture of the existing legal framework governing the trade in pesticides in the EU and of the extent to which this illegal trade involves large organised crime groups.
- Cross-border investigations that exploit intelligence from joint operations (e.g., during 'importing season': Jan/Feb) and enable the identification of High Value Targets through EU-level supply chain analysis (e.g., performing key roles in production, export/import, logistics and wholesale).
- Adoption of a comprehensive response to address the wide spectrum of health and environmental threats associated with illegal pesticides through increased cooperation of law enforcement, other government agencies, in particular pesticide regulatory authorities, and private sector partners (e.g., companies with a capability for analysing suspicious chemicals, as well as storing and destroying hazardous materials).
- A study on improving the traceability of hazardous materials used in the illegal production of pesticides.

This report was produced as a joint assessment by the Europol SCAN Team, Europol's AWF Copy and the European Commission.