

€10 million worth of illicit refrigerant gases seized

OLAF teamed up with Europol and 16 countries
for a Joint Inspection Week against illicit HFCs

One week of operations coordinated by the Dutch authorities and supported by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and Europol resulted in the seizure of at least 2100 cylinders of illicit HFCs – hydrofluorocarbons – for an estimated value of over 10 million euros. Illicit imports of these gases circumvent EU rules and can cause significant damage to climate.

The Joint Inspection Week (JIW) took place from 20 to 25 September. Operations in 16 countries aimed to track down possible illicit imports of so-called F-gases into the EU and identify the importers. Information was systematically shared across national borders – a paramount element to combat trafficking with such international dimensions.

Close to 1700 inspections were carried out during the JIW, leading to seizures for a total of at least 2100 cylinders of F-gases, 7 arrests and the notification of numerous administrative and criminal infringements. The carbon footprint of such quantities of HFCs equals to roughly 142,000 tonnes of CO₂.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said: *"Fighting the illicit trade in HFC is an active contribution to protecting the environment and to the EU's ambitious climate goals under the European Green Deal. OLAF has been active in tackling illicit imports of HFCs since 2018 and we have made it one of our operational priorities. Cooperation with national, European and international authorities is key to the success of our activities and the JIW is a good example of that: the results of the operation stem from hand-in-hand work with Europol and the national authorities of 16 countries."*

The participating countries were: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain.

The JIW was coordinated by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management – notably the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate / Intelligence and Investigation Service, ILT-IOD. OLAF and Europol provided their support throughout the operation. The JIW was part of EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats), under the Environmental Crime priority. More information can be found in the [ILT's press release](#).

Background

Hydrofluorocarbons – HFCs – are commonly used in cooling units. However, they are also powerful greenhouse gases. Their imports into the EU are subject to strict quotas, and any importers must be registered. The EU has an F-gas regulation that includes a progressive phase down of the consumption and production of HFCs by 79% by 2030 (compared to levels in 2014).

OLAF has been working closely with national and international authorities across the globe to put a halt to attempts to circumvent the EU's regulation and smuggle HFCs into the EU. This work has led to several important seizures in recent years.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences:

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

Once OLAF has completed its investigation, it is for the competent EU and national authorities to examine and decide on the follow-up of OLAF's recommendations. All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a competent national or EU court of law.

For further details:

Jana CAPPELLO
Spokesperson
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)
Phone: +32 2 29 85549
E-mail: olaf-media@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud



Kirill GELMI
Press Officer
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)
+32 2 29 88146
olaf-media@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud

