

OLAF teams up with Europol against illegal pesticides

Over 1,200 tonnes of illegal pesticides were seized as part of the 2021 Operation Silver Axe, the Europol-led operation which involved 35 different countries and led to seizures of illegal and counterfeit products worth an estimated €80 million. The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) tracked suspicious live shipments of illegal pesticides, leading to the seizure of around 39 tonnes of this total.

OLAF has participated in the annual Operation Silver Axe for a number of years, using its expertise in identifying and tracking suspicious shipments to provide crucial heads-up and information to the national authorities that were able to intercept the illicit goods and prevent them from arriving in Europe.

Under EU rules, national authorities may grant so-called parallel trade permits to companies, allowing them to produce pesticides even if they are not the original developer of the product, on the condition that the product is identical to the original. In order to reduce costs, some producers substitute the authorised active ingredients for ones that are illegal for use in the EU.

In a similar way, pesticides that are made using ingredients that are banned within the EU can nonetheless pass through European Union territories pretending that they are en route for other markets. Pesticides coming from China, India and UK, for example, can be put in transit in an EU Member State and declared for further export. In some cases, however, these products remain in the EU, where they are sold on the black market. OLAF monitors suspicious movements of such products, which are then reported to national authorities and controlled by customs and plant protection authorities.

Ville Itälä, Director-General of OLAF, said: *"We are proud to have played our part in this year's Silver Axe operation, as we have done in previous editions. We have many years of experience in analysing, monitoring and tracking suspicious shipments and identifying potentially counterfeit and illegal products or ingredients. This information underpins many of the controls and checks that take place each year. The knowledge of OLAF and its ability to track down goods on the move are key factors to successfully identify and stop illegal shipments or illicit products from reaching the EU market. This is vital work in keeping European citizens and environment safe from harmful products."*

More details on Operation Silver Axe can be found in [Europol's press release](#).

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.

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