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## **550 tons of illegal pesticides seized with OLAF's help**

Milestone 2019 pesticide seizure could cover the territory of Estonia

**Operation Silver Axe IV, coordinated by Europol with support from the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), led to the seizure of 550 tons of illegal or counterfeit pesticides. The 2019 seizure is large enough to cover a surface of up to 50,000 km<sup>2</sup> - the size of a country like Estonia. Numerous police, customs and plant protection authorities from 29 countries participated in the operation (\*).**

OLAF Director-General, Ville Itälä remarked: *"EUROPOL and OLAF provided vital support and expertise to the Member States involved in the operation. With our help, police, customs and plant protection authorities were in a better position to meet the complex challenges posed by the trade in illicit and counterfeit pesticides."*

The close cooperation between OLAF, EUROPOL, European and international bodies (\*\*), national level police, customs and plant protection authorities, as well as the private sector, was crucial to the success of the operation, playing a significant role in both detection and prevention.

Pesticides are smuggled by criminal networks in complex contraband operations, which often stretch across borders. *"It is very difficult for a single authority to intercept smugglers. OLAF brings added value by providing our operational partners with key information on the movement of smuggled goods across the EU,"* further explained Mr Itälä.

The OLAF Director-General concluded by saying that *"the smuggling of pesticides poses a threat to the environment, the agricultural sector and ultimately to the health and safety of consumers."*

During the operational phase, OLAF selected 120 suspicious shipments of pesticides coming from third countries, mainly China, that were either declared as being in transit in the EU, or declared for export from the EU to a third country - Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Turkey.

These suspicious shipments were signalled to the participating national and third country customs authorities by OLAF, directly or via EUROPOL.

As part of the operation, checks were performed at major seaports, airports and land borders, as well as in production and repackaging facilities in participating countries.

(\*) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

(\*\*) The European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety DG SANTE, OLAF, INTERPOL and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

## **Background**

Operation Silver Axe is now in its fourth year, and has led to seizures of 1,222 tons of illegal and counterfeit pesticides in total. For more information, please see our previous press release on this subject: [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/media-corner/news/11-07-2018/olaf-helps-seize-360-tons-illegal-or-counterfeit-pesticides-operation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/media-corner/news/11-07-2018/olaf-helps-seize-360-tons-illegal-or-counterfeit-pesticides-operation_en).

The trade of counterfeit products results in vast illicit profits and huge losses of tax revenues for the EU and its Member States. The smuggling of counterfeit products harms the European economy, damages legitimate business and stifles innovation, putting many jobs at risk in Europe. Counterfeiting also poses serious risks to the environment and health and safety.

OLAF is competent to conduct investigations related to the smuggling of counterfeit goods, thereby protecting the EU and its Member States from customs and tax revenue losses. OLAF particularly focuses on the smuggling of potentially dangerous products.

### **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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