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76 tonnes of illicit refrigerant gases detained in Romania thanks to OLAF intelligence

Operations carried out by the Romanian authorities, based on intelligence supplied by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), have helped keep 76,045 kg of illicit refrigerant gases, with a potential global warming impact of 170,000 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide, off the EU market.

The gases, hydrofluorocarbons or HFCs, are authorised for use in refrigeration units. However, since they are known to have a significant carbon footprint – 2,200 times their own mass, according to estimates – their import into the EU is subject to strict quotas, and any importers of the gases need to be registered.

OLAF investigators had been monitoring a suspicious shipment from China that had been discharged in Turkey, removed from its container and re-routed by truck to the EU. The customs documents accompanying several shipments revealed that they were destined for five different consignees in Romania. Four of the consignees were not registered to receive imports of these gases, while the fifth one would have significantly exceeded its quota for 2020 with its share of the shipment. In addition, in most of the cases, the refrigerant gases were packaged in non-refillable cylinders, which are banned in the EU.

OLAF alerted the Directorate General of Customs in Romania, which in turn liaised with the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests as well as with the National Environmental Guard, to prevent the shipment reaching the EU market.

OLAF Director-General, Ville Itälä, thanked the Romanian authorities for their continuous support: *"Good cooperation between OLAF and national authorities leads to successful operations and helps keep people safe. This is the second case this summer where OLAF intelligence has kept several tonnes of illicit refrigerant gases off the EU market. The fight against the illegal import of HFCs into the EU is one of OLAF's operational priorities, in line with the European Commission's ambition to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050 with its European Green Deal. The environmental impact of these illicit imports can be devastating. Preventing them from entering the EU is OLAF's contribution to protecting citizens, the environment and legitimate trade."*

Earlier this summer, [Dutch authorities seized approximately 14 tonnes](#) of illicit refrigerant gases following an alert by OLAF.

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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