

JCO KHIONE: OLAF and EU Customs Authorities crack down on illegal trade in refrigerant gases

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) led Joint Customs Operation KHIONE aimed at disrupting the illegal trade in refrigerant gases smuggled into the European Union. The operation, which ran from May to October 2024, resulted in the successful interception of the equivalent of more than 400,000 tons of CO₂ and prevented the total market loss of over 4.5 million euro.

OLAF coordinated Joint Customs Operation KHIONE, codenamed after Greek goddess of snow, alongside customs authorities from 16 Member States as well as Türkiye and Ukraine. It focused on identification and monitoring of consignments of refrigerant gas for which the suspicion existed that the goods would be smuggled into the EU. The operation included inspections of warehouses and distributions centres where the illicit refrigerant gases were often stored for resale on the black market.

Director-General of OLAF Ville Itälä said: *“Joint Customs Operations are a key part of OLAF’s mission to protect both EU financial interests and the environment. Illegal trade in refrigerant gases not only undermines the EU’s green goals but also endangers public safety. Through this operation, OLAF and national customs services have shown that we can effectively disrupt this dangerous trade.”*

Refrigerant gases are potent greenhouse gases that contribute significantly to climate change. Under the EU’s F-Gas (fluorinated greenhouse gases) Regulation, strict quotas are imposed on the import and use of HFCs, with the goal of gradually phasing down their use in favour of more environmentally friendly alternatives. However, demand for these gases remains high, creating an opportunity for criminal networks to exploit the system and circumvent the rules.

JCO KHIONE, which took place over several months, brought together customs authorities from Poland, Latvia, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania, Türkiye and Ukraine.

The operation underscores the importance of cooperation between European institutions and national authorities in addressing environmental fraud, which often involves complex cross-border networks. For further information about the operation, you can read [the article issued by the Polish Customs authorities](#).

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.

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