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OLAF helps Italian authorities seize 3.7 tonnes of illicit refrigerant gases

Italian customs authorities stopped a shipment of 300 cylinders of illicit, climate-damaging refrigerant gases from entering the EU early last month. OLAF supported the operation by providing the Italian authorities with additional information regarding the consignment.

The cargo had travelled from China to the port of Livorno, Italy. It contained approximately 3.7 tonnes of hydrofluorocarbon gases (HFC) and hydrochlorofluorocarbon gases (HCFC), packaged in 300 non-refillable cylinders. Italian customs authorities identified the consignment as suspicious and seized it after verifications and information provided by OLAF confirmed its illicit nature.

HFC gases are widely used in refrigerated units, but because of their heavy environmental footprint, imports into the EU are subject to strict quotas. The importer of the seized consignment had no right to fill any of these quotas; moreover, the imported gases were in non-refillable cylinders, which are not allowed to be imported into the EU. The environmental impact of the cargo, had it reached the market, would have been roughly equivalent to the emissions produced by a car travelling for 35 million kilometres, around 6,800 tonnes of CO₂. More details about the seizure can be read (in Italian) in the [press release of the Italian Agency for Customs and Monopoly](#).

This is the latest in a series of cases involving illicit imports of refrigerant gases this summer where OLAF has provided invaluable support to national customs authorities. One cargo was [seized by the Dutch authorities](#) and another [by the Romanian authorities](#) thanks to intelligence provided by OLAF.

Commenting on the latest case, OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said: *“One positive cooperation case leads to the next. We are happy that OLAF was able to support the Italian authorities in this successful operation, just as we did earlier in the year with our colleagues in the Netherlands and Romania. This is precisely the kind of cooperation that we are working hard to establish between OLAF and national authorities, not only in Europe but across the globe. Such cooperation is the key to defeating the smugglers and counterfeiters, and all the more important when it helps stop dangerous gases like HFCs causing irreparable damage to our environment, health and economy.”*

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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