

12.5 tonnes of illegally imported refrigerant gases seized with OLAF's help

In close cooperation with OLAF, the Italian Customs Agency seized 12.5 tonnes of fluorinated greenhouse gases, so called hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) last week. The seizure follows OLAF's pledge to make the fight against the illegal imports of HFCs into the EU one of its operational priorities, fully matching one of the key priorities of the new Commission: making Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050, "the European Green Deal".

The Italian Customs Agency seized 1 098 cylinders containing HFC gas (R134a, R410a and R404a) in the region of Lombardy on 5-6 February 2020. This successful operation was the result of intelligence received by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and of close operational cooperation between OLAF and the Italian Customs Agency.

The products seized have a high Global Warming Potential (GWP), estimated to be thousands of times more than their own mass, approximately 26 269 tonnes of CO₂e, as per the CO₂e calculation formula in Regulation (EU) No 517/2014 on fluorinated greenhouse gases (F-gases).

Tonnes of CO ₂ Equivalent and GWP			
HFC	GWP	Kg. Seized	Tonnes CO ₂ e
R134a	1.430	4.060	5.805,80
R410a	2.088	6.570	13.718,16
R404a	3.922	1.720	6.745,84
			26.269,80

According to calculations by the Italian Customs Agency, this total amount of carbon dioxide corresponds to CO₂ emitted by more than 100 small cars (110 CO₂ g/km), along a distance of almost 239 million kilometres.

HFC gases were introduced as replacements for ozone depleting substances, and are often used in refrigerated units. HFCs do not deplete the ozone layer but are potent greenhouse gases, often with a high global warming potential. The fight against the illegal import of HFCs into the EU is one of the operational priorities for OLAF, in line with the key priority of the Commission to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050, "The European Green Deal". To this end, OLAF organised a Conference on the fight

against illegal imports of refrigerant gases into the EU in Brussels last month to gather information from industry and stakeholders in the area, and strengthen the exchange among customs authorities and the competent environmental 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.

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