



EUROLAB Special Briefing

Counterfeiting food report - Europol

More than 1200 tonnes of fake or substandard food and nearly 430 000 litres of counterfeit drinks have been seized in an Interpol-Europol coordinated operation across 33 countries in the Americas, Asia and Europe.

The **operation Opson III**, conducted throughout December 2013 and January 2014, and supported for the first time by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers, involved police, customs, national food regulatory bodies and partners from the private sector, with checks carried out at shops, markets, airports, seaports and private homes.

"Most people would be surprised at the everyday foods and drink which are being counterfeited, and the volume of seizures shows that this is a serious global problem," said Michael Ellis, head of Interpol's Trafficking in Illicit Goods and Counterfeiting unit, which coordinated activities between the world police body's participating countries across the globe. "Interpol is committed to turning back this threat to public health and safety by organised criminal networks which are making millions in profits which can then be channelled into other illicit activity such as human and drug trafficking," added Mr Ellis.

Fish and seafood represented the largest category of foodstuffs seized. Some 685 tonnes were recovered for offences including poor preservation, being incorrectly labelled and one seizure of 484 000 kg of yellow fin tuna which did not have the required documents for traceability.

Countries which took part in Opson III: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, South Korea, Sweden, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam.

EXAMPLES:

- In Italy an organised crime network behind the manufacture and distribution of fake champagne was discovered. Material to prepare 60 000 bottles including fake labels were seized following raids on two sites, with three people arrested and 24 others reported to authorities.
- In Spain, 24 people were detained for illegal work and immigration offences after 4.5 tonnes of snails illegally taken from woods and fields were recovered.
- In Bangkok, Thailand, Royal Thai Police raided a warehouse and recovered more than 270 bottles of fake whiskey, as well as forged stickers, labels and packaging.

“The success of Operation Opson III demonstrates the joint commitment of Colombia, Europol and Interpol to the serious fight against international smuggling. Furthermore, it has allowed **the seizure of 278 tonnes of food and 17 364 bottles of liquor with an estimated value of USD 172 809 64**. This operation marks a milestone in further strengthening the cooperation required to tackle the multiple forms of global crime,” said Brigadier General Gustavo Alberto Moreno Maldonado, Colombia’s Director of Fiscal Police and Customs.

For further information please access the following **link**:

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/thousands-tonnes-fake-food-and-drink-seized-interpol-europol-operation> or contact the **EUROLAB General Secretariat**: info@eurolab.org