

China's customs officers go back to school to learn to detect CFC12

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Shanghai Customs College is teaching customs officers how to spot CFC12 smuggling and other green crimes being committed at China's borders

Officers from China's regional customs agencies last week began a training program developed by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) open to customs officers from 18 countries in the Asia Pacific region.

The green scheme's 'train-the-trainers' approach is geared to helping officers control and monitor the imports and exports of chlorofluorocarbon refrigerants and other Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS).

Between September and November last year, China Customs seized nearly 8.2 metric tons of CFC-12, (also known as the chlorofluorocarbon dichlorodifluoromethane), an ODS used in refrigerant and air conditioning systems.

The CFC-12 seizures were part of Project Skyhole Patching, a Chinese initiative launched last September to combat illegal trade in ozone depleting substances and hazardous waste in the Asia Pacific.

The scheme's front-line fight against illegal green trade will include the schooling of officers in how best to help countries comply with the freeze and phase out schedules for ODS under the Montreal Protocol, the global treaty banning the international trade of ODS.

The black market for illegally imported CFCs to countries such as the US means illegally-imported CFC-12 can be sold for \$2 per pound while legally obtained CFC-12 sells for \$20 or more.

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has reported discrepancies of CFC trade data between China and Indonesia, which indicates the occurrence of large-scale smuggling. 'Chinese data shows exports of 1,529 tons of CFCs to Indonesia in 2004, but Indonesian data shows imports of 248 tons of CFCs from China in the same year. The big data discrepancies have existed since 2001,' an EIA report stated.

China Customs operates at 253 first-class ports including airports, sea ports and land passes and as well as 200 second-class ports. China has a land border 13,670 miles long and a sea border of 11,184 miles. China's CFC12 seizures of 752 kilograms at Shengzhen and 7.5 metric tons at Huanpu Port.

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)'s initiative involves officers from 20 customs and environmental authorities from 18 countries. These are Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, the Maldives, Mongolia, New Zealand, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam