



Stakeholder Update

FROM THE IPR CENTER OUTREACH & TRAINING UNIT



HSI-Cartagena reports record maritime seizures of counterfeit cigarettes



CARTAGENA, Colombia – Homeland Security Investigations–Cartagena, working cooperatively with Colombian authorities, say seven individuals have been arrested following the seizure of more than \$1.7 million worth of counterfeit cigarettes believed to be part of an illegal trade of black-market tobacco.

The arrests and seizure occurred after the Colombian Navy interdicted a vessel in Colombian waters about 40 miles north east of Cerro Aguila (Antioquia). After boarding the vessel, authorities discovered more than 1.7 million packs of black-market cigarettes bearing the brand name of “WIN.” It appears the vessel traveled from Panamanian waters where the individuals allegedly acquired the illegal cargo.



Late last month, authorities arrested six individuals after the Colombian Navy interdicted two go-fast vessels in Colombian waters off the coast of Necoclí, a town and municipality in Colombia located on the eastern

shore of the Gulf of Urabá. After boarding the vessels, authorities discovered 187,500 packs of black-market cigarettes bearing the brand names of “ULTIMA” and “GOLD CITY.”

The seizures are part of *Operation Up in Smoke*, a joint effort between the IPR Center, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Container Security Initiative (CSI)-Cartagena; Colombian Navy; and Fiscal and Customs Police, a unit of the Colombian National Police in charge of investigating large financial frauds. Their work also supports the National Directorate of Taxes and Customs.

The investigations were conducted collaboratively with the assistance of brand protection experts from Phillip Morris International.

So far, *Operation Up In Smoke* has resulted in the arrests of 22 individuals and the seizure of more than 2.2 million packs of cigarettes with a street value in excess of \$2 million.

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