



IPRC CONNECTIONS

Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center

APRIL 2019

IPR Center hosts meeting with Mexican delegation



Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Deputy Director Ronald Vitiello was introduced to members of a Mexican delegation during their visit to the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (IPR Center). The delegation, led by Mexico's Customs Commissioner Ricardo Peralta-Saucedo and several of his assistants, briefed Director Vitiello on a variety of issues including the need to continue bilateral cooperation and collaboration with Mexico's "Servicio de Administración Tributaria" (SAT), the revenue service of the Mexican federal government, in the fight against IPR violations at the ports of entry. The discussion also focused on

increased law enforcement at local markets in the fight against criminal gangs that control the piracy markets and counterfeiting.

The delegation also expressed a willingness for and support of training programs for Mexican customs personnel. A training program entitled *Illicit Trade and Finance Investigations* will be held next month in Mexico City. The training will provide SAT officials with an overview of money laundering investigations and will seek to improve collaboration in trade-based money laundering schemes.

IPR Center Director Alex Khu announces retirement



On April 30, 2019, I am retiring from federal law enforcement, after 21 years of service. It has been an incredibly exciting and wonderful journey that took me to the west coast where I worked narcotics trafficking, online money laundering and counterfeit pharmaceutical investigations in California; to ICE headquarters and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) cyber crimes and undercover operations; to the bold and frigid north, where I served as the special agent in charge of St. Paul, Minnesota and spearheaded intellectual property surge operations as the federal coordinator for Super Bowl LIII; and finally, returning to the Washington D.C. area as the director of the IPR Center.

Throughout my career I've had the opportunity to work with some of the hardest working, intelligent, talented, and dedicated men and women. This was especially true at my last stop where I witnessed firsthand the unwavering commitment by the IPR Center staff, partners,

and private industry members who continually fight to keep the public safe from counterfeit and substandard goods, as well as protecting U.S. industries from economic harm through customs/trade fraud investigations.

I am happy to announce Special Agent in Charge (HSI Detroit) Steve Francis will succeed me as director of the IPR Center and will serve as the HSI assistant director for the Global Trade Investigations Division beginning May 1. Steve has a real passion for intellectual property, trade fraud and counter-proliferation programs, and is excited to take the division to even greater heights. I am proud to have worked alongside all of you, and I commend you for keeping Americans safe.



Trade agreements, environmental programs featured in IPR Center training

A popular training course conducted by the IPR Center enters its third year this month for HSI and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel. The two-week Intellectual Property and Trade Enforcement Investigation (IPTEI) course focuses on intellectual property rights/trade fraud detection and investigations. Each class is comprised of HSI special agents and intelligence officers and CBP import specialists, officers, and regulatory auditors. National Program Manager Heather Sykes delivered a presentation on the Trade Agreements Program that targets illegal importation and exportation of products in violation of free trade agreements. National Program Manager Elliott Harbin, who manages the Environmental Crimes Program, highlighted issues related to investigations of the importation and exportation of endangered and non-native detrimental species of land, sea and air animals and plants; seafood fraud; unapproved or non-compliant automobiles; and environmentally hazardous materials. Harbin also explained the need to pinpoint the origin of illegally harvested wildlife products that often expose huge profits among transnational criminal organizations.

Operation Firefox yields \$55 million in counterfeit goods

HSI-Cartagena seized nearly 36,000 pairs of counterfeit athletic shoes and more than a 1,000 other miscellaneous items connected with copyright infringement involving top brands such as Nike, Adidas, New Balance, Reebok, Puma, and Under Armour. The seizures were made after inspections at the port of Buenaventura. The counterfeit merchandise, with an estimated street value of \$3 million, was seized by local Fiscal and Customs Police. The shipment, which originated from Panama, was manufactured in China. This HSI-led investigation is part of Operation FireFox that has been responsible for the seizure of a multiple containers with counterfeit merchandise valued at \$55 million.



Toy Association voices concerns over counterfeit toys sold online

It could be any parent's nightmare; a popular magnetic toy set made in a variety of rainbow-colored shapes that turns into an illicit product sold by a third-party vendor via a popular e-commerce site. What's even worse is finding out the same product is non-compliant with the strict safety standards and regulations that toys are subject to in the United States. For a family in Wisconsin, this nightmare was all too real as their four-year old son was able to easily break apart the toys to ingest more than a dozen magnets, resulting in a life-threatening situation.

The proliferation of copycat and unregulated toys via online marketplaces raises significant safety and health hazards for consumers. The Toy Association's new white paper, "*The Real Threat of Fake Toys: The Increase of Knockoff and Counterfeit Toys Sold Online & How to Fight Back*," identifies three main factors contributing to the upsurge in knock-off, counterfeit, and otherwise illicit toys being sold via online marketplaces. To learn more about this, and other safety tips, please visit www.toyassociation.org

United States Council for International Business visits IPR Center

Members of the United States Council for International Business (USCIB), an independent business advocacy group that promotes free trade and helps represent U.S. business interests, met with IPR Center staff and partners to discuss the ongoing fight against illicit trade including counterfeit and pirated goods, and related crimes. One of the group's primary goals is expanding market access for U.S. products and services abroad. USCIB maintains an active membership base of some 300 multinational companies, law firms and business associations as a U.S. affiliate of the International Chamber of Commerce. The meeting also focused on strengthening public-private partnerships and information-sharing.

Five charged with illegally operating online pharmacies

The arrest of five Argentinian men from Buenos Aires makes yet another compelling case to be cautious about illegal online pharmacies and their distribution of potentially deadly drugs. The charges and arrests resulted from a multi-year investigation that included HSI. Here is more on the story: [Illegal Online Pharmacies](#)

Did you know...

Virginia has become the 20th state to enact a law that makes it a crime for anyone to knowingly manufacture, import, sell, install, or reinstall a counterfeit air bag or nonfunctional air bag, or any device that is intended to conceal a counterfeit air bag or nonfunctional air bag, in a motor vehicle.



The IPR Center encourages companies and private industry organizations to help fight (IP) theft and trade law violations by displaying the "Report IP Theft" button on websites that will link users with a form to detail their allegations. For more information on how to obtain this tool, please visit our website: <https://www.iprcenter.gov>

For more information on these stories, or to submit information for stories in future editions of IPRC Connections, please contact Chuck Jackson, charles.e.jackson@ice.dhs.gov, or (703) 603-3941. In the meantime, please follow us on Twitter: [@IPRCenter](https://twitter.com/IPRCenter).