



# IPRC CONNECTIONS

*Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center*

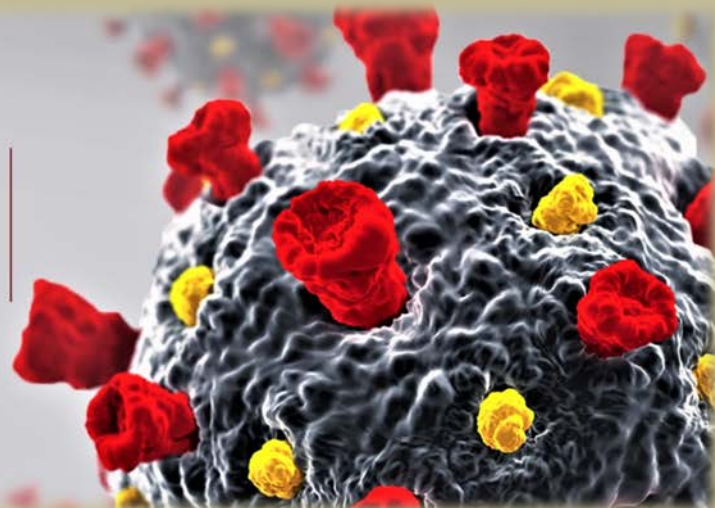
MAY 2020

## Homeland Security Investigations launches Operation Stolen Promise

### OPERATION STOLEN PROMISE

Email us at:

[covid19fraud@dhs.gov](mailto:covid19fraud@dhs.gov)



The National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (IPR Center) is participating in **Operation Stolen Promise**, an initiative led by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to combat COVID-19 related fraud and other criminal activity. Working with multiple federal departments and agencies –along with business and industry representatives – HSI is responding to criminal activity surrounding the pandemic with an equally robust investigative response to protect the American public.

In remarks prepared for delivery to a recent audience of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Task Force on Countering Illicit Trade, IPR Center Director Steve Francis explained how HSI's expertise in global trade investigations, financial fraud and cyber investigations is supported by robust private and public partnerships to disrupt and dismantle criminal activity and strengthen global supply-chain security.

"For more than 10 years, the HSI-led IPR Center has led the government's response to combatting global intellectual property theft and enforcement of its international trade laws," Francis said. "We are the primary HSI division for the exchange of information and intelligence related to COVID-19 illicit criminal activity."

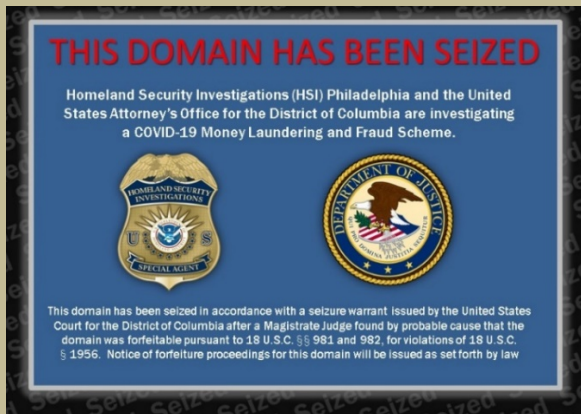
Since launching Operation Stolen Promise, HSI special agents have opened nearly 300 investigations nationwide, seized more than \$3 million in illicit proceeds; made 10 arrests; executed 18 search warrants; analyzed more than 18,000 COVID-19 domain names and worked alongside Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to seize more than 445 shipments of mislabeled, fraudulent, unauthorized or prohibited COVID-19 test kits, treatment kits, homeopathic remedies, purported anti-viral products and personal protective equipment (PPE).

In addition to CBP, HSI is partnered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), Secret Service, the Internal Revenue Service, the FBI, and the Five Eyes Law Enforcement Working Group.

IPR Center uses its expertise as part of Global Trade Investigations Division

The IPR Center serves as central clearing house for investigative information often shared cooperatively with not only its 25 domestic and international partner agencies, but also with HSI field offices and attaché offices around the world. Here are just a few highlights of some of the cases that have made recent headlines:

HSI special agents used the IPR Center partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Criminal Investigations to arrest a Georgia man for attempting to sell millions of nonexistent respirator masks to the VA. Click here to read [more](#).



HSI and U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia obtained a warrant authorizing the seizure of 'coronaprevention.org,' following an HSI Philadelphia investigation in support of Operation Stolen Promise. You can read the full story [here](#).

A Texas man arrested by the FBI is now named in a criminal complaint revealing a COVID19 hoax in which he allegedly paid someone to spread coronavirus at grocery stores in the San Antonio area. Here's [more](#).

HSI worked with USPIS and the Environmental Protection Agency to arrest a Georgia resident for allegedly selling illegal products claiming to protect against viruses. Here's [the story](#).

HSI, FDA special agents, USPIS, and CBP worked swiftly with City of London Police during a global investigation that led to the arrest a British man for smuggling mislabeled drugs into the U.S. as alleged treatments for those suffering from COVID-19. Read the story [here](#).

Here are some useful tips to help protect against COVID-19-related fraud:

- Verify the identity of any company, charity, or individual that contacts you regarding COVID-19
- Check websites/email addresses offering COVID-19 info/products, or services. Scammers often use phony addresses to fool you, like "cdc.com" or "cdc.org" instead of "cdc.gov."
- Beware of unsolicited emails offering information, supplies, or treatment for COVID-19, or requesting your personal information for medical purposes.
- Avoid opening links or email attachments from unknown or unverified sources that could expose you a virus on your computer or other electronic devices. And most of all, never forward these emails.
- Make sure your computer and other electronic devices are protected with the latest updates for your anti-malware and anti-virus software.

IPR Center and its partners move forward with non-pandemic related actions

Excessive lead in clothing & children's pajamas that could go up in flames are two of the most recent discoveries in shipments seized by CBP in cooperation with the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Read the full story [here](#).

An investigation by HSI, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and CBP has resulted in importers paying more than \$5.2 million to settle allegations of evading customs duties and fees on furniture imported from China. Here's more on the [story](#).

IPR Center welcomes new team members

**Sabrina Sweat-Kajogbola** is the new unit chief for the IPR Center's Outreach and Training Unit, arriving from the HSI San Francisco office where she served as an HSI assistant special agent in charge. **Scott Francis** has been named section chief for the Counterproliferation Investigations Unit. Scott has been with HSI since 2007. **Antwoine Jones** is the new section chief of INTEL for the Global Trade Investigation Unit. He started his federal career with CBP in Detroit and joined HSI in 2006. **Kevin Martin** has been named as section chief for the Commercial Fraud Unit. He began his federal career in 1996 with the U.S Capitol Police and later served as a special agent in HSI-Blaine and HSI-Baltimore. **Lisa Tucker** is a management and program analyst responsible for budget oversight as it relates to the training programs conducted cooperatively with the IPR Center domestically and internationally. **Britney Walker** is serving as our new public affairs representative. Britney had been serving as a member of the ICE national press team prior to her arrival. **Patricia Rossiter** has been assigned as the new FBI unit chief in the agency's IPR Center office, where – as a special agent – she oversees a staff of agents and civilians that investigate cyber-crimes and those associated with trade secrets, intellectual property theft.

*Did You Know...* that U.S. IP-intensive industries account for nearly one-third of all employment and approximately 40 percent of our country's gross domestic product, an estimated \$6.6 trillion? It's all part of [World IP Day](#).



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](mailto:charles.e.jackson@ice.dhs.gov), or (703) 603-3941. In the meantime, you can follow us on Twitter: [@IPRCenter](#)