
**INTERNATIONAL POLICE COOPERATION: PRESENTATION OF THE
ICPO-INTERPOL AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN PREVENTING AND
COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME**

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SUMMARY

International Criminal Police Organization-Interpol is the only global organization of its kind and it has 177 member countries. The General Secretariat is located in Lyons, France. The purpose of the Organization is to ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities, within the limits of the laws existing in the different countries and to establish and develop all institutions likely to contribute effectively to the prevention and suppression of ordinary law crimes, including environmental crime.

Each member country has an Interpol National Central Bureau through which international police cooperation is coordinated.

The Organization maintains a database on all environmental crime cases reported to the General Secretariat as well as individuals and companies involved in this type of crime.

An Interpol Project group with participants from United States, Canada, the Netherlands and Germany is preparing an Interpol Environmental Criminal Investigation Training Program.

1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental crime is a relatively new area for any police force in the world and consequently also for Interpol. This type of crime is extremely diversified and encompasses a large number of related offences which can be covered either in specific, general or civil legislation depending on the legal systems and type of crime committed in the countries concerned.

Law enforcement agencies have encountered many problems when investigating environmental crime cases. They have discovered that the information has to be collected from many different authorities in the country such as the national management authorities as well as from authorities at the local level. In some cases they need information or investigative assistance from abroad and it is crucial to have one central contact point in order to coordinate the international police cooperation in the various cases.

Cooperation at the national level between agencies responsible for environmental enforcement and at international level as well is also essential for the success of the investigation.

2 STRUCTURE OF INTERPOL

Interpol is the only global police organization. It has 177 members. The purpose of the Organization is:

- to ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities, within the limits of the laws existing in the different countries; and
- to establish and develop all institutions likely to contribute effectively to the prevention and suppression of ordinary law crimes.

It is strictly forbidden for the Organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character, as is clearly stated in the Organization's Constitution.

Respect for these principles in day-to-day cooperation obviously means that Interpol cannot have teams of detectives with supranational powers who travel around investigating cases in different countries. International police cooperation has to depend on coordinated action on the part of the Member States' police forces, all of which may supply or request information or services on different occasions.

Each Member State designates an office, normally a part of the national police force, as its National Central Bureau. The exchange of information is conducted through the National Center Bureaus which monitor the flow of messages.

The General Secretariat is the permanent administrative and technical body through which Interpol speaks. It implements the decisions taken by the General Assembly, the Executive Committee and other deliberative organs. In order to coordinate and facilitate various actions for combating transnational organized crime, the General Secretariat provides the following services to the Member States:

- A criminal intelligence service, which assists Member States in identifying, arresting and prosecuting international criminals. The General Secretariat maintains its own criminal data base which contains nominal data of known criminals as well as case summary and properties used in criminal cases. For its content, the data base depends on the information provided by the Member States. Analytical study of certain criminal cases conducted by a team of experts is an integral part of the above-mentioned service.
- A liaison function, which facilitates the exchange of information between Member States, implemented either through the numerous meetings/conferences which the General Secretariat hosts or attends, or through the efforts of its liaison officers well-informed both in respect of their special fields as well as the regions they represent.
- A number of training courses, both at a regional and international level, designed to assist Member States in improving their infrastructures regarding communication and criminal investigation.
- A technical support service which has not only developed an independent and secure telecommunications network, but is currently in the process of upgrading the systems in Member States, enabling them to send/receive information as quickly and securely as possible.

The General Secretariat has also developed cooperation, and collaboration, with a number of intergovernmental or non-governmental international organizations. Interpol is always ready to take the advice of other organizations to enhance the international cooperation among law enforcement agencies.

3 INTERPOL ACTIVITIES IN COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

It was as early as 1976 that the first Interpol Resolution on Environmental Crime was adopted. It urged the National Central Bureaus to take action to combat the illegal traffic in species of wild flora and fauna.

During the seventies and eighties, society focused more and more on environmental issues and, because of this, the law enforcement agencies also became more involved with environmental crime.

Following an Interpol resolution adopted at the Interpol General Assembly in 1992 it was decided to set up a Working Party on Environmental Crime.

The purpose of this Working Party is to bring together investigators and/or decision-makers from member countries to identify the various problems that arise in connection with environmental crime investigations and then to find possible solutions.

The Working Party could also consider making recommendations regarding the adoption of legislation to combat environmental crime and the harmonization of existing legislation.

The first meeting of the Working Party, which was held in September 1993 and was attended by delegates from 11 countries, considered it necessary to create subgroups in order to discuss the various subjects of environmental crime effectively.

The following key subjects in relation to environmental crime were identified during the first meeting of the working party and subsequently the following subgroups were established:

- Sub-Group 1: Trans-border movement and dumping of waste products.
- Sub-Group 2: Illegal traffic in real or purported radioactive or nuclear substances.
- Sub-Group 3: Illegal traffic in species of wild flora and fauna.
- Sub-Group 4: Coordinating the results of Sub-Groups 1, 2 and 3.

One of the results of the Working Party has been the preparation of the "Eco-Message" to improve the exchange of information in environmental crime cases as well as the collection, storage, analysis and circulation of such information with the assistance of the General Secretariat. It is simply a formatted message containing all relevant information such as

- date of offence;
- place of discovery;
- the actual waste product, radioactive/nuclear substances, specimen of seized animal;
- name and date of birth of the person arrested;
- route of transportation;
- modus operandi;

- possible companies involved; and
- assistance needed.

These “Eco-messages” are included in our criminal registration system at the General Secretariat and thus the information is available for all law enforcement officials in the member countries and can be used when looking for specific trends in cases and seizures as well as for day to day work with operational cases and intelligence gathering. The message can also be used for requesting assistance from other member countries.

The Environmental working Party has also initiated analytical projects which have been prepared by our Analytical Criminal Intelligence Unit on the illegal traffic in reptiles and the illegal traffic in nuclear and radioactive materials.

Since 1996 the Interpol General Secretariat has organized annually International Conferences on Environmental Crime where law enforcement officers from our member countries discuss issues to combat environmental crime as well as share experience and expert knowledge. The 3rd International Conference on Environmental Crime was held in October 1998.

4 INTERPOL ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION TRAINING PROGRAM.

Having recognized the importance and the need of special training for law enforcement officers investigating environmental crime, a project group was established during the 1st International Conference on Environmental Crime to prepare a training program for law enforcement officers on investigating environmental crime.

The group is chaired by a representative from the US Environmental Protection Agency and includes representatives from Environment Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the police in the Netherlands and Germany as well as the Interpol General Secretariat. A project manager from Environment Canada is monitoring the project.

The training course is being finalized and the first training course is planned to take place in the beginning of 1999. The training course will last 4 days and covers subjects on officers’ safety and survival, environmental awareness, recognizing environmental offences, surface, water and groundwater pollution, air pollution and illegal land disposal together with transportation and storage of hazardous materials.

A training video with several environmental crime scenarios will be included in the material as well.

5 CONCLUSION

In order to combat effectively environmental crime it is important to cooperate at the national level as well as international level with other law enforcement agencies and competent authorities involved in this area.

Interpol provides the machinery for the international police cooperation which is increasingly necessary in today’s world. Criminals are not impeded by national frontiers and we have to ensure that international investigations can be properly completed, criminal activities can be stopped, disrupted or prevented, offenders can be apprehended and once apprehended that they are properly dealt with by law.

If law-breaking goes unpunished, legislation remains theoretical.