

## INTERPOL'S ECOMESSAGE

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### SUMMARY

Interpol developed a database called the Ecomessage in order to coordinate international efforts to combat environmental crime. In addition to improving communication among environmental law enforcement personnel in different countries, the Ecomessage database allows for criminal analyses to determine trends and commonalities of criminal activity. It can also assist in environmental enforcement targeting. This paper discusses the objectives and mechanism of the Ecomessage.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Objectives of the Ecomessage

There is general agreement that environmental crime is one of the most profitable and fastest growing areas of international criminal activity. According to the International Crime Threat Assessment, a report prepared by an interagency US government task force, environmental crime syndicates worldwide garner between \$22-31 billion US. These crimes range from hazardous waste dumping, smuggling proscribed hazardous materials, to exploiting and trafficking protected natural resources. Criminal networks and syndicates, motivated by high profits and low risks, have established an international industry that:

- Endangers the health and welfare of our communities and future generations.
- Compromises the natural heritage and ecological integrity of the planet.
- Unfairly disadvantages those

businesses complying with environmental laws, and

- Flouts environmental law as well as many other laws.

It is important to keep in mind that environmental crime can be both localized, but also transnational. For example, an incident of illegal dumping of hazardous waste or illegal trafficking of protected wildlife, obviously concerns the location where the event occurred. Nevertheless, generators, transporters, agents, principals, and witnesses can be far from the scene, and frequently reside beyond national borders. In those cases, environmental crime is effectively countered only by good international cooperation.

Interpol, the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO) has been making efforts to suppress environmental crime since 1976. As part of this effort, Interpol in 1994 set up an Environmental Crimes Committee, which is comprised of a Working Group on Wildlife Crime, and a Working

### Group on Pollution Crime.

More than a quarter-century of experience has persuaded Interpol that the timely exchange of pertinent information is crucial to any campaigns that target international environmental crime. Interpol has also learned, however, that information exchange between various countries can suffer disruptive complications because:

- Required information often must be collected from widely scattered sources.
- Countries do not have uniform reporting methods.
- There had been no international repository for the collection, storage, analysis and circulation of information useful in efforts against environmental crime.
- Investigators in one country often did not know which law enforcement agency or agencies were their appropriate contacts in other countries.

Interpol acted to resolve these shortcomings by creating the Ecomessage. With the Ecomessage, Interpol created a reporting system and database that covers all major environmental crime, including:

- Illegal transboundary movements and illegal dumping of wastes and other hazardous materials.
- Illegal transboundary activities involving radioactive substances.
- Illegal trafficking of wild flora and fauna species.

## 2 ECOMESSAGE: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT FUNCTIONS

Interpol's General Secretariat in Lyon, France, serves as a central collection point for information on international environmental crime. Interpol has developed the Ecomessage as a reporting system that systematically accepts environmental crime data and enters it into a computerized data collection facility at the General Secretariat.

The Ecomessage system uses a simple form to transmit details of a particu-

lar crime to the Interpol. The Ecomessage form is carefully designed. When Interpol receives environmental crime reports via the Ecomessage, the standardized design of the communication permits:

- Speedy and methodical entry of the report's details in a format that is compatible with the Interpol database.
- Efficient cross-referencing of the data against other entries in the computerized database.
- Organized and meaningful extraction of that data in a way that facilitates applications such as criminal intelligence analysis.
- An Ecomessage report must be transmitted to Interpol via a standardized procedure and routing. This systematic approach helps to assure the validity of the data transmitted, and in turn, provides for more dependable results when that information is used.

Many governmental law enforcement agencies may be involved in enforcement of environmental laws. The environment ministry or agency may have various enforcement authorities. Customs is often the agency that intercepts and seizes contraband consignments of waste shipments, endangered fauna or flora, or banned substances. Water police and coast guard authorities can be involved if the case concerns pollution on surface waters. National and local police departments are often involved in environmental law enforcement, as are Attorneys General, and other governmental agencies.

Any of these agencies may gather the information required for an Ecomessage report. When the information is gathered, however, it should be brought to the Interpol National Central Bureau (NCB) of the reporting country. This is usually found in the international relations department of the national police. It is their responsibility to transmit the details of an Ecomessage to the Interpol General Secretariat. This responsibility is outlined in Interpol circular letter reference 38/DII/SD2/E/INT/WG/2/

ENV/94 of 9th June 1994, which should be on file in every Interpol National Central Bureau worldwide.

When the Interpol General Secretariat receives an Ecomessage, the information contained is entered into Interpol's computerized database. There are several important benefits that are generated by this process:

- The information is immediately screened against all other information in the Interpol computer. This can produce important feedback. For example, if Country X reports the arrest of Mr. A on charges of illegally transporting waste, the processing of the Ecomessage may produce information that Mr. A is also wanted by Country Y for a similar offense, or that he has already been convicted in Country Z for a related offense. Information on concurrent warrants for arrest, or prior convictions, is of great interest and importance to prosecuting attorneys.
- The Ecomessage form also has provision for the reporting country to ask questions, and provides a mechanism for international cooperation. For example, imagine a wildlife dealer has shipped an illegal consignment of protected parrots into Country X from country Y. Using the questioning possibilities of Ecomessage, investigators in Country X can ask for information about the wildlife dealer in Country Y, or the carrier involved. It can also ask anything else where international information exchange will help the case along.
- Data collected in Interpol's computers can be accessed by professional analysts of the Interpol Analytical Criminal Intelligence Unit. When there is adequate reliable data available, very useful analyses can be conducted to reveal the criminals involved, as well as the size, structure and dynamics of criminal enterprise or network involved.

Although Interpol has been using the Ecomessage for a number of years, the

database is still too small to produce a truly global analysis of the criminality associated with international environmental crime. More data must be put into the system – via Ecomessage reports. Once statistically significant masses of data are acquired, they can be analyzed and used to construct a world-wide picture of the illegal international environmental crime.

### **3 APPLICATIONS OF THE ECOMESSAGE**

Interpol's Wildlife Crimes Group has used the Ecomessage data in two analytical projects in recent years. One project focused on illegal trafficking in reptiles, and the other on trade in live primates. Both were conducted in cooperation with Interpol's highly professional Analytical Criminal Intelligence Unit, and produced important overviews of criminal syndicates engaged in illegal wildlife trade. Link analyses identified individuals, and their relationships to each other within a loose federation of a crime network. Hypotheses were tested, conclusions were reached and recommendations were made. Acting on these recommendations, law enforcement authorities targeted individuals and syndicates identified in the study. This resulted in several syndicates being terminated and several individuals arrested and prosecuted. The most noteworthy prosecution was that of illegal reptile dealer Anson Wong, who was apprehended on an Interpol Red Notice in Mexico City, and subsequently extradited to the United States, where he pleaded guilty to 40 felony counts of violations of wildlife laws. He was sentenced to serve 71 months in a U.S. prison.

### **4 CURRENT EFFORTS INVOLVING THE ECOMESSAGE**

Interpol's Pollution Crimes Working Group in conjunction with INECE sent out an electronic mailing to environmental enforcement managers throughout the world recently informing them of the Ecomessage. Similarly, Interpol's Wildlife

Crimes Working Group in partnership with the International Fund for Animal Welfare, sent out a mailing to wildlife enforcement officers around the world also encouraging them to prepare Ecomessages and forward them to Interpol's National Central

Bureaus. Only through cooperative efforts of law enforcement, ministry environmental enforcement officers, prosecutors and NGOs do we have a chance to succeed in our fight against environmental crime.