

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

1. Speedy and methodical entry of the report's details in a format that is compatible with the Interpol database,
2. Efficient cross-referencing of the data against other entries in the computerized database, and
3. Organized and meaningful extraction of that data in a way that facilitates applications such as criminal intelligence analysis.

Ecomessage is a system. 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. Assured validity increases the reliability of the information in Interpol's database, and 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. 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. The NCB is usually found in the international relations department of the national police. If you have difficulty locating the Interpol NCB in your country, you can contact Mr. Mark Measer at Interpol in Lyon, France who will inform you how to locate the NCB. His contact information is:

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200, quai Charles de Gaulle
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It is the NCB's 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 NCB worldwide.

Benefits of Submitting an Ecomessage

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:

1. The information is immediately screened against all other information in the Interpol computer. This can produce important feed-back. 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.
2. The Ecomessage form also has provision for the reporting country to ask questions, and provides a mechanism for international cooperation. For example, imagine a waste broker has shipped an illegal load of hazardous waste into Country X from country Y. Using the questioning possibilities of Ecomessage, investigators in Country X can ask for information about the waste broker in Country Y, or the carrier involved. It can also ask anything else where international information exchange will help the case along.
3. 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.

Current Limitations of the Ecomessage System

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.