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DATE: 15 January 2018
SERIAL: MAPAC-15012018
COUNTRIES: Global

ALERT ---- MARITIME & AIR (PASSENGER & CARGO)

SUBJECT: **Painting Wildlife Products as a Concealment Method for Illegal Ivory and Rhino Horn**

DATA: Wildlife traffickers regularly paint illegal wildlife products, especially cut pieces of elephant ivory and rhino horn, as a concealment method to traffic wildlife on passenger aircraft as well as in air cargo and maritime shipments.

Modus Operandi:

The use of paint (to include stains and varnishes) to obscure illegally smuggled wildlife products is an established method of concealment in active current use by wildlife traffickers.

Although traffickers regularly vary their specific methods, the following general patterns in the use of paint by wildlife traffickers are evident in available open source and confidential reporting.

- *Cut Ivory and Rhino Horn Pieces:* Paint seems to be used primarily to obscure smaller, cut pieces of illegal elephant ivory and rhino horn (versus whole tusks or horns), in both large and small quantities, according to Taskforce analysis of recent and historical seizures. Cut pieces of ivory and rhino horn are often, but not always, cylindrically shaped.
- *Black and Red Paint:* Traffickers appear to predominantly use black and/or red colored paints, stains, and varnishes, according to available information. This is likely because red and black are perceived by traffickers as better able to obscure the true nature of smuggled ivory and rhino horn pieces versus other colors.
- *Made to Appear as Wood or Stone:* Painting illegal wildlife products is typically combined with attempts to make the contraband appear to be legal items, typically wood (e.g. rosewood or ebony), stone (soap stone), charcoal, or carvings made of wood or stone, according to available information.

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- *Associated Tactics and Goods Declarations:* Historically, painted illegal wildlife products smuggled in maritime and air cargo shipments have typically been declared simply as the good or commodity the items have been made to resemble, e.g. wood or stone. On passenger aircraft, painted wildlife contraband has variously been concealed in passengers' clothing as well as packed in carry-on and checked baggage, sometimes using secondary concealment tactics, e.g. packed in food containers or suitcase liners.



Approximately 2kg of painted rhino horn pieces seized in January 2018 by Hong Kong Customs from a passenger arriving from Maputo, Mozambique via Addis Ababa Ethiopia, who had attempted to conceal the illegal items in his clothing and checked baggage. (Photo: Hong Kong Customs, 2018)



635 cylindrically cut ivory pieces originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and declared as rosewood, seized in 2012 in Istanbul, Turkey. (Photo: Istanbul Police Department, 2012)

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Geography:

Wildlife trafficker use of paint as a concealment method for illegal wildlife products has been documented in air and maritime ports in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. However, it should be considered a global risk, in particular on all known major wildlife trafficking routes.

Red Flags:

Although traffickers regularly modify their tactics and routings to avoid detection, any combination of the following may indicate a higher risk of wildlife trafficking activity related to the use of paint as a concealment method for illegal wildlife products, especially along high-risk routes for wildlife trafficking between Africa and Asia:

- Large quantities of similarly shaped painted items.
- Items painted red and/or black.
- Items declared as rosewood, ebony, soapstone, or other wood or stone products, and which appear to be painted.
- Shipping weight does not appear consistent with declared goods and volume.
- Physical signature of items when scanned does not appear consistent with the declared description or visible nature of the items to be transported.



Illegally transported ivory statues seized by British authorities at Heathrow Airport, which had been painted black and declared as ebony wood sculptures. (Photo: Heathcliff O'Malley/The Telegraph, 2017)

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ACTIONS: This alert is assessed as most relevant to the general categories of action checked below.
All decisions and actions informed by this alert are the sole responsibility of the receiving organization

- Conduct reasonable checks on shipments fitting a similar profile
- Execute / enhance internal controls or procedures relevant to this information
- Report / share information to customs / law enforcement
- Information has potential security implications for company employees

SOURCE: This advisory is based on UfW Transport Taskforce analysis of recent enforcement actions as well as open source and confidential reporting from partners. We have *high* confidence in the reliability and validity of this information, with the following caveat: the data upon which this analysis is based is exclusively anecdotal and is therefore inherently limited to available information and likely incomplete.

PRIORITIES: This alert is related to the following Transport Taskforce information sharing priorities (checked):

- Wildlife trafficker networks, behavior, intentions, and operational tactics and strategy
- Indicators of suspicious or higher risk activity ('red flags') related to wildlife trafficking
- Data potentially reportable to or shareable with law enforcement
- Security/physical risks and vulnerabilities to transport company operations, facilities, or staff
- Unintentional facilitation of illegal wildlife demand or retail trade

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CONTACT: For questions or additional data/analysis relevant to this alert, or to report suspicious shipments or indicators of wildlife trafficking activity, please contact the UfW Transport Taskforce:
transport@unitedforwildlife.org

SHARING: UfW Transport Taskforce Alerts are confidential documents for limited distribution within the transport and law enforcement sectors only, and should not be released publicly. We encourage you however to share Taskforce Alerts with colleagues from within the transport industry or law enforcement who may find them useful. Before sharing alerts outside your organization, please contact one of your Taskforce contacts to inform them with whom you will share the alert(s). This information is required in order to maintain visibility over who is receiving the alerts within the transport and law enforcement sectors.

END