



CUSTOMS FREEZES 'ICE' IN CANDLES

Customs officers at their Sydney container examination facility have made one of Australia's largest seizures of illicit drug crystalline methylamphetamine, commonly known as "ice".

The officers detected 125 kg of 'ice' inside a shipping container from China and followed this seizure by assisting the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to identify and dismantle the Australian base of an international narcotic smuggling syndicate.

Customs NSW Regional Director David Collins said the operation began when Customs intelligence analysts selected a sea container for examination at Port Botany.

"When the shipment was inspected at the examination facility, officers noticed anomalies in a number of cardboard boxes," he said. "All the boxes had been declared on the manifest as containing wax candles.

"A closer examination revealed 624 candles had been hollowed out. Each contained approximately 200gm of crystalline methylamphetamine."

This detection is the second largest seizure of ice to be made in Australia. The seizure has an estimated street value of approximately \$100 million.

An extensive operation was conducted by the AFP based on the Customs detection, which resulted in the arrest of two men allegedly attempting to access the shipment at a storage facility in the Sydney suburb of Homebush. Another man was arrested at a Sydney hotel located near Chinatown in connection with the seizure and a number of search warrants were executed on other premises in inner Sydney suburbs.

Three foreign nationals aged 38, 41 and 42 years old were charged. They were refused bail and will reappear in Sydney's Central Local Court in January 2005.

Mr Collins said the joint operation by Customs and the AFP had prevented a major quantity of potentially lethal drugs from reaching the streets.

"It again demonstrates our ability to disrupt drug trafficking and defeat attempts, however ingenious, to breach Australia's borders," he said.

Customs officers in Western Australia uncovered a second consignment of "ice" in hollowed-out candles.

Officers detected approximately 1kg of the drug in an air cargo package from China described as Christmas candles and samples.

Customs opened the package after x-ray images of the package showed anomalies in the centre of the candles. Further tests with x-ray and ionscan equipment indicated the presence of crystalline methylamphetamine powder hidden within each candle.

When the consignment was deconstructed, 995gm of "ice" were found inside the six candles. Inquiries surrounding this seizure are continuing.

Australia's largest detection of "ice" was made in Sydney in May 2003 when 233kg of the drug was found among cartons of rice sticks in a shipping container from China.

