



Right: Children pat Scout, an eight-week-old puppy, training to become a detector dog.

Above: A Customs officer demonstrates itemiser technology.

Article and pictures by Amanda Palmer

Children learn about Customs technology

Searching a ship's cabin for hidden contraband isn't how most children expect to learn about technology. But at this year's 'Amazing World of Science' exhibition in Canberra this is exactly what happened.

Visitors to the Customs stand had the opportunity to see for themselves how Customs uses technology such as trace particle detection, radiation detection and snake eye cameras to help protect Australia's borders.

The 'snake-eye camera' proved popular with children of all ages, who quickly learnt how to manoeuvre the tiny camera to see on a screen exactly what was hiding under the bed. Here they found several weapons including plastic guns, a dagger and an axe. On a bookshelf in the corner, a hollowed-out book showed children the extent some people will go to in order to smuggle things into Australia. A minor radiation source in the top draw next to the bed also set the radiation pager off as children continued to search for prohibited items.

Older children and adults were enthralled by the itemiser technology. They learnt in a simple and practical way how Customs detects the presence of drugs. Children and adults swabbed areas around the cabin to see if they could find where someone might have hidden drugs.

Another popular drawcard at the Customs stand was Scout - the eight-week-old chocolate point Labrador. Dog demonstrations were conducted on the weekend where children and adults had the opportunity to see Detector Dog Vinnie sniff out some illegal contraband.

An assortment of confiscated goods, including trademark, animal products and weapons, also attracted significant interest and inquiries.

Almost 21,000 children from almost 90 schools attended the event over five days.