

International efforts put a dent in the illicit drug trade

Combating the scourge of illicit drugs can sometimes mean getting out of your comfort zone and into the jungle, as members of the AFP recently discovered.

The value of international policing partnerships in combating serious and organised crime has again been highlighted after Australian authorities helped the Cambodian National Authority on Combating Drugs (NACD) to destroy 15 tonnes of safrole, a volatile substance used to produce the illicit drug MDMA, which is also known as 'ecstasy'.

Safrole is a colourless or slightly yellow liquid that comes from certain types of sassafras tree. The trees are rare in Cambodia, growing only in the jungles of the Cardamom Mountains. The entire tree is cut down and the timber used to fire clandestine furnaces which distill safrole-rich oil from the roots.

After seizing large quantities of this illicit substance, Cambodian authorities approached the Australian Federal Police for assistance. A specialist group led by the AFP destroyed the oil using portable incinerator technology. A multilateral delegation was also invited to Cambodia to witness the destruction.

In addition to members of the AFP's Specialist Response Amphetamine Type Stimulants Team (SRATS) and AFP Forensic and Data Centres, the delegation included personnel from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the NSW Fire Brigade Hazardous Materials Unit, the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and

the Arts, and the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

The Cambodian Government also invited members of the Indonesian National Police and Myanmar Police Force as observers.

Commissioner Tony Negus said the exercise demonstrated the AFP's commitment to fighting serious and organised crime, and emphasised the AFP's determination to work with its domestic and international partners to combat drug trafficking at its source. He said the AFP is focused on taking a holistic approach to this crime type, both in Australia and the south-east Asian region.

"Organised crime continues to evolve as law enforcement agencies become more adept at infiltrating their operations, and the AFP works closely with its partners to ensure our continued success against these criminals," Commissioner Negus said.

The Minister for Home Affairs, Brendan O'Connor supported the operation, and said the Australian Government is working closely with other nations in the region and around the world to fight illegal drug activity.

"The destruction of 15 tonnes of safrole oil in Cambodia this week by the Australian Federal Police and local authorities is an excellent example of such cooperation, putting a major dent in the drug trade," Mr O'Connor said.

"The safrole oil, when turned into ecstasy, would have had a street value of approximately A\$6 billion.

"The outcome of the burn is a positive result, not only in the fight against illicit drug activity, but also in showing the success of positive collaborative relationships between the AFP's International Network and its partners."





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01: A safrole still in the Cambodian jungle. Photo courtesy Tim Wood. **02:** AFP member donning safety equipment before the burn. **03:** Burning the safrole oil. **04:** AFP members start the burn.



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