

Narcotic detection

now portable



top: A swab sampler being used to pick up the possible presence of narcotic particles.

middle: The swab is removed from the sampler for testing.

bottom: The swab is then inserted into the hand-held trace-detection instrument for analysis.

To boost operational preparedness for narcotic detection in the marine and aviation environments, Customs has begun evaluating hand-held versions of trace-detection instruments.

Customs has been using narcotic trace-detection instruments for several years.

Customs has 52 ionscan units in operation at international airports, seaports and postal facilities around Australia, including on Christmas Island.

An ionscan machine can detect up to 45 different substances and is able to expose traces of narcotics with only billionths of a gram of the substance present. It is credited with many significant drug seizures since its deployment but its main drawback is its size.

While transportable, it weighs 22kg and measures 40cm x 34cm x 32cm. This weight and bulk is nearly doubled when in its carry case. It therefore is primarily designed for land use, not portable enough for deployment on ships and aircraft.

But Customs is evaluating two hand-held instruments. Both weigh around 3kg and are the size of a shoebox.

Field trials have been conducted on prototypes and results and comments provided to the manufacturers. Further trials are planned.