

AUTHORITIES SEIZE BIGGEST 'ECSTASY' HAUL



In November 2004, Customs and Australian Federal Police officers in Sydney seized a massive 820kg of MDMA (ecstasy) tablets and powder, worth around \$200 million, in what was the biggest single seizure of the drug in Australia.

Two people were arrested in relation to the shipment, which was almost as much as the total amount of MDMA seized in Australia in the whole of 2002-03.

Previously, the biggest MDMA importation into Australia was 342kg detected in a joint operation in Sydney in a sea container from the Netherlands in June this year.

The MDMA tablets and powder in this shipment were allegedly found in a bakery oven which originated in Poland and was airfreighted from Germany to Sydney in October.

The consignment was chosen by Customs intelligence analysts and x-rayed at Customs container examination facility at Port Botany.

The examination allegedly revealed suspicious packages hidden in the wall and base cavities.

A physical inspection revealed 62 boxes allegedly containing approximately 115kg of MDMA powder and 705kg of tablets. It is estimated that almost three million tablets were contained in the boxes, bearing a variety of logos and colours.

A subsequent two-week operation led to the arrest of two men when they allegedly took delivery of the oven and accessed its contents in a factory unit in the Sydney suburb of Wetherill Park.

A 54-year-old Kings Cross man and a 32-year-old New Italy (north coast of NSW) man appeared in Parramatta Local Court. They have been charged under the Customs Act and the Criminal Code with conspiring to import prohibited imports and attempting to possess prohibited imports. They have been

remanded in custody to face trial in early January. Customs NSW Regional Director David Collins said the amount of MDMA seized in the shipment was "simply staggering".

"This is another outstanding example of the effectiveness of Customs targeting skills," Mr Collins said. "This shipment was selected from the 60,000 air cargo consignments that enter Australia through Sydney each week."

There is no doubt that the seizure of such a large quantity of MDMA will have a significant impact on the availability of this dangerous drug on Australian streets.

Australia is working with overseas law-enforcement agencies to investigate a similar type of attempted MDMA importation in Adelaide.

The operation began in May when Dutch and Belgian police substituted about 365kg of MDMA tablets in a pizza oven consigned to Adelaide.

Three members of the syndicate allegedly involved in the importation have been arrested in The Netherlands, Belgium and Italy.

Customs and AFP officers in Adelaide continue to investigate other possible Australian connections.