



Homeland Security Investigations Intellectual Property Unit



PHARMACEUTICALS

OPERATION APOTHECARY

The National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (IPR Center) is leading the government's response to intellectual property theft, a crime that leads to lost revenue for American industry, a loss of American jobs, and often poses a threat to public health and safety. Operation Apothecary (Apothecary) is an IPR Center initiative targeting the smuggling or illegal importation of unapproved, counterfeit, or adulterated pharmaceuticals entering the United States via international mail facilities, express courier hubs, and land borders.

Apothecary was initiated in 2004 to address and attack vulnerabilities in the entry process that might allow for the smuggling of commercial quantities of counterfeit, unapproved, controlled or adulterated drugs. Over time, the program has adjusted to address the importation of smaller amounts of counterfeit drugs; these smaller importations have risen dramatically as consumers are able to order products directly via online stores. Consumers purchase pharmaceuticals over the internet with the belief that the products advertised are legitimate products, but in fact the products are often a counterfeit or unapproved version that may have been manufactured in unsanitary conditions or not subjected to proper safeguards and quality controls. Criminals posing as legitimate pharmaceutical providers advertise prescription drugs or inexpensive alternatives for sale without requiring a valid prescription.



The online sale of counterfeit pharmaceuticals is a global problem. As part of Apothecary, the IPR center participates in the INTERPOL-led operation, Pangea. Operation Pangea is the largest global internet-based operation focusing on illicit websites selling fake or counterfeit medicines. Pangea engages police, customs, and national regulatory authorities to target websites supplying fake and illicit medicines, and it has an outreach component that engages the public to increase awareness of the serious health risks posed by unapproved, counterfeit, or adulterated pharmaceuticals.



Apothecary combines the expertise of Homeland Security Investigations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal Investigations, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.