



## HSI ramps up Operation Team Player leading up to Super Bowl



The Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)-led National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (IPR Center), working cooperatively with multiple federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, is conducting [Operation Team Player](#) (OTP) this week leading up to the Super Bowl, the annual championship game of the National Football League (NFL). This year's game is being played at the Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida, where HSI special agents will closely monitor multiple locations around the stadium and in the cities of each participating team in search of vendors and individuals selling and distributing counterfeit sports apparel, both on the street and online.

Consumers are also being warned about the counterfeit gear, urging them to look for obvious signs of fakery. Bad colors, misspellings, and loose threads are all warning signs of fake sports apparel. In 2020, OTP seized a record-breaking \$123 million of counterfeit Super Bowl merchandise from flea markets, retail outlets, and street vendors – a 400% increase from 2019.

A joint press conference involving HSI and many other federal, state and local law enforcement partners will be carried live from Tampa, Florida on Wednesday, February 3, beginning at 3:00 p.m. (EST). You can tune in here: [Live Streams | ICE](#)

In the meantime, CBP is keeping a close eye on pre-game shipments of counterfeit goods. For example, an alert team of CBP officers recently intercepted a shipment of [fake Super Bowl rings](#) in Pittsburgh.

## IPR Center forges formal partnership to combat IP theft globally



*Enhancing IP and trade law enforcement globally*

The IPR Center has announced a [formal partnership](#) with the International AntiCounterfeiting Coalition (IACC) to protect legitimate manufacturers, retailers and consumers, across every sector of the global economy, by preventing illegal counterfeit goods from entering the United States. Derek Benner, former executive associate director for HSI which oversees the IPR Center, and Bob Barchiesi, IACC president, announced the partnership and its framework to enhance investigative efforts into intellectual property crime through joint events, law enforcement training, community outreach and information sharing.

***“HSI is eager to formalize the IPR Center’s partnership with IACC,” said Benner. “This agreement will not only serve to expand networks to combat intellectual property crime, but, develop joint initiatives to educate stakeholders. HSI and the IACC share a common belief that counterfeiting poses a severe risk to public health and safety and is a danger to our economy. This convergence of goals, combined with the IACC’s large and diverse membership, allows us to enhance our protection and education of consumers about the dangers of counterfeit goods.”***

***“Fakes kill jobs, innovation and people,” Barchiesi added. Only by working together can we protect consumers and businesses, especially entrepreneurs, from the dangers of counterfeiting and piracy. We have partnered with the HSI and the IPR Center for many years and it is an honor to cement our collaboration through this MoU. I commend Derek Benner’s leadership and the efforts of his team for their innovative and tireless efforts working with the IACC and private sector to keep American businesses and consumers safe. I look forward to growing our partnership in the years to come.”***

The agreement was signed by Benner, prior to his recent retirement as executive associate director for HSI.

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## New toolkit to help communities address black market vapor products



*Inside this cover is a tool kit for law enforcement and communities*

In addition to the many partnerships the IPR Center maintains through Operation Stolen Promise, another partnership has been created with the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) to promote public safety and support enforcement against counterfeit and other black-market vapor products. This partnership was kicked off with a virtual introduction to a public health and safety toolkit, *“Addressing Black-Market Vapor Products,”* developed in partnership with NCPC with the intent of serving as a critical asset for addressing, preventing, and enforcing the unique and persistent challenges of illicit market vaping.

*“The IPR Center is committed to working with its federal and industry partners to identify, interdict, and investigate individuals, companies, and criminal organizations engaging in the illegal importation of products that threaten the health and safety of the American public,”* said IPR Center Director Steve Francis.

*“We are especially proud to announce this public-private partnership at a time when consumers are being targeted by scammers everywhere they turn. Together, we can combat the dangers of illicit vapor products through awareness and education,”* said NCPC President and CEO Ann Harkins.

The virtual kickoff attracted nearly 70 participants who pledged their support of the campaign.

Learn more about this important joint effort to protect adult consumers from the risks of illicit vapor products at [www.ncpc.org/PublicHealthandSafety](http://www.ncpc.org/PublicHealthandSafety). Remember to keep all vapor products -- authentic ones and fakes -- out of the reach of those under 21 years of age.

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## IPR Center partners with PMI on combatting illicit trade



*IPR Center Director Steve Francis signs an MOU with PMI's Vice President of External Affairs J.B. Simko. Standing behind them are Hernan Albamonte, head of PMI's Illicit Trade Prevention and Donya Jackson, national program manager for the IPR Center's Illicit Tobacco Program.*

The IPR Center has signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MOU) with Philip Morris International Inc. (PMI) to assist and support HSI strategies to address illicit tobacco trade operations and other intellectual property rights investigations.



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## #ICYMI In Case You Missed It

[International Customs Day](#), a worldwide observance instituted by the World Customs Organization (WCO) commemorating the day in 1953 when the inaugural session of the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC) was held in Brussels, Belgium last week. Seventeen European countries attended this session. In 1994 the CCC was renamed World Customs Organization (WCO) and today custom organizations from 179 countries are WCO members. The IPR Center is proud to recognize our partners, INTERPOL and Europol, for their work with the Center, and the collaboration that supports our attaché offices around the world.

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## February is Black History Month



Each February, DHS and all of its components – including ICE – join the nation in celebrating African American History Month — a time to recognize the numerous achievements and contributions of African Americans to our culture and society. Here at the IPR Center, we proudly shine the spotlight on Lewis Rice, the senior vice president of Global Security and Trademark Protection for The Estée Lauder Companies. In this capacity, he leads a worldwide team of security executives responsible for protecting company employees and products.

Prior to this assignment, he held numerous senior leadership positions during his 26-year career with the Drug Enforcement Administration, overseeing operations in New York, Michigan, Ohio and Kentucky.

In addition to receiving the Achievement Award from the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) in 1997, he is also an active board member of the Frederick D. Suydam Memorial Association, the Federal Enforcement Homeland Security Foundation, the DEA Survivor's Benefit Fund, the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition and the DEA Educational Foundation.

The IPR Center salutes Mr. Rice and his colleagues at The Estée Lauder Companies for their partnership over the years in support of our mission. You can learn more about the company's commitment to diversity by visiting their website for [Commentary from The Estée Lauder Companies' Network of Black Leaders and Executives Employee Resource Group](#)

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## USPTO report reveals new trends on patents and trademarks

The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) has published a new [report](#) on the impact of patent and trademark filing trends in China. The report, entitled *Trademarks and Patents in China: The Impact of Non-Market Factors on Filing Trends and IP Systems*, reveals how the high rate of Chinese patent and trademark filings may well be influenced by government subsidies and other non-market factors, rather than inventiveness and organic economic activity within China

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## Top Cases



*Misbranding can be a key indicator in determining authenticity of the product inside. (photo courtesy CBP)*

**CBP officers in Louisville** have seized two shipments containing 618 misbranded [bottles of Viagra](#) containing 18,540 pills. The shipments were heading to an individual in Burton, Michigan. If genuine – and approved by the FDA – the pills would have had an estimated manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP) of more than \$1.31 million.

**A federal indictment** has been unsealed charging a Michigan man with one count of possession with intent to distribute "tetrahydrocannabinols," commonly known as "THC," the psychoactive substance that produces the "high" associated with smoking marijuana. The indictment followed the individual's arrest in a case being investigated jointly with special agents from HSI.

The indictment alleges that in September 2019, the man drove from Michigan to Cleveland, Ohio, with over 1,000 THC vape cartridges in his vehicle with the intent to sell the vape cartridges in the northern part of the state.

After learning of the alleged trip, the Food and Drug Administration issued warnings, urging the public to stop using vaping products containing THC amid more than 1,000 reports of lung injuries—including some resulting in deaths—following the use of vaping products.

Cincinnati CBP officers closed out 2020 with a significant seizure of [counterfeit masks](#) that were packaged advertising protection against communicable respiratory diseases. Just before Christmas, officers inspected a shipment from China that contained 21 shipping boxes of masks labeled as 3M Mask Model 1860.

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### More than \$1M of counterfeit designer masks intercepted by CBP in Louisville



Alert CBP officers in Kentucky seized these counterfeit designer face masks

CBP officers in Louisville, Kentucky halted a shipment arriving from Vietnam that contained more than 5,700 [designer face masks](#). The masks were allegedly being shipped to a residence in North Carolina.

### Former video store owner sentenced to five years for selling counterfeit DVDs

A Maine man has been sentenced in federal court for mail fraud and copyright infringement stemming from his online sales of [counterfeit DVDs](#).

According to evidence presented at the trial, the individual owned a chain of video rental stores in eastern Maine and operated three websites from which he made more than \$638,000 in sales of over 48,000 counterfeit copies of copyright-protected motion pictures. Representatives of MGM, CBS, Disney, Mercury Pictures and other copyright owners testified that he did not have permission to reproduce and distribute the movies. A senior investigator employed by the Motion Picture Association identified the DVDs as counterfeit.

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### Did you know...

HSI represents a workforce of more than 10,400 employees, including special agents, criminal analysts, mission support personnel and contract staff assigned to offices throughout the U.S. and worldwide. And, that most of the 7,100 special agents are assigned to offices in 225 cities across the nation. HSI's domestic footprint is supplemented by more than 2,800 task force officers representing key strategic federal, state and local partners in the fight to combat transnational criminal organizations. There's more, if you click [here](#).

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### Training events

Philip Morris International (PMI) conducted a virtual webinar providing an update on the status of illicit trade in tobacco products in the African and Middle East regions, citing South Africa, Libya, Sahel, and Saudi Arabia as examples. The webinar examined the presence of illicit manufacturers, the gravity of transit hubs, the link between illicit trade and terrorism, the role of free trade zones, as well as efforts to counter the threats.

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