

Drug Intelligence Brief



DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION
INTELLIGENCE DIVISION

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BLACK COCAINE

In February 1998, law enforcement officials discovered a new cocaine concealment method used by Colombian traffickers. Cocaine HCl is mixed into a red/black powder substance, leading officials to dub it "black cocaine." The unique quality of this substance is produced by a combination of elements that create a reddish-black color and render most drug detection test kits (the ones based on color) useless. DEA's El Paso Intelligence Center reports that drug-detection canines also are not alerting on the presence of cocaine. According to German forensic analysis, the presence of iron thiocyanate prevents or masks a positive reading for cocaine during color reaction-based tests (i.e., Becton Dickinson test kits). However, the "Securtec Drugwipe-Test" is one field test that is still effective.



Europe, Africa, South America, and North America have all experienced the phenomenon of black cocaine. Colombia has been the only reported country of origin, and, according to DEA reporting, high-ranking officials within the Colombian National Police have remarked publicly about their concern over this "new substance." Traffickers ship black cocaine from Colombia to market through fictitious companies as well as through legitimate companies that are unaware of their involvement in the drug's transport.

The first seizure of black cocaine was reported by German Customs officials in March 1998 in their weekly information bulletin (*RG - INFOR*). A 15-kilogram postal package was intercepted and found to contain a homogeneous black powder labeled as industrial dye. After a Drugwipe-Test indicated the presence of cocaine HCl, further testing revealed that iron and potassium thiocyanate were mixed into the cocaine. The cocaine HCl would not have been sold in "black" form, but instead would have been extracted by using a commonly available solvent such as acetone or ether.

Concurrent to the German seizure, the Technical and Investigative Section of the Colombian *Fiscalia* detected cocaine HCl camouflaged in black iron shavings. Unfortunately, a color reaction-based field test proved negative, allowing a 19-kilogram shipment from Colombia to Togo to pass through the Netherlands undetected.

During mid-1998, a joint operation in Colombia by members of INTERPOL, the *Fiscalia*, the Public Ministry, and the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* resulted in the seizure of 193 kilograms of a substance labeled "red scarlet pigment 3600." Intelligence provided by Dutch Customs officials at Schipol International Airport alerted Colombian authorities to the presence of drugs. The shipment, destined for South Africa, was labeled as "industrial colorant." All preliminary field tests for cocaine (used on the seized odorless, granular, black-red material), were negative. At the request of Colombian officials, the DEA performed an analysis that discovered cocaine intermixed with black, magnetic iron particles and potassium thiocyanate.

Due to the difficulty of detecting black cocaine, DEA's Special Testing & Research Laboratory will attempt to develop a more effective field test to help recognize cocaine and potassium thiocyanate intermixtures.

This report was prepared by the Europe-Africa-Asia Unit of the International Section. Comments and requests for copies are welcome and may be directed to the Intelligence Production Unit, Intelligence Division, DEA Headquarters, at (202) 307-8726.