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INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE
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North America

In the past the movement of drugs to North America was seen primarily on the Pacific coast. There has been a shift of late to Caribbean routes. Rather than multi ton shipments increasingly shipments are being spread out into smaller loads (about 150 kg) for transport to markets. Submersibles and semi-submersibles continue to be used and in some instances drugs are transferred from these vessels to go fast boats. A new trend with submersibles and semi-submersibles is their use on the Caribbean side. Cocaine in liquid form is moving to North America, Europe and Australia by means of sailing craft leaving along the Atlantic side from source countries so as to avoid controls in place on the Pacific side. While land routes have for the most part been used to move marijuana from Mexico to the US there has been a shift to using high powered go fast boats for this purpose.



Caribbean

Increasingly drugs are being moved to and through this region by maritime means. This includes the use of go fast boats, recreational vessels (sailing craft), fishing vessels and converted trawlers. Submersibles and semi-submersibles have been seen used near Guyana. The Dominican Republic remains an important focus for drugs moving through the region. Routes for the movement of drugs show a



continuing link between this sub-region and West Africa. Typically when being pursued traffickers will dump the drugs they are carrying over-board. Some are resorting to attaching a bag of cocaine to a bag of sand and gravel. When dumped over-board the two bags sink. As the sand mixes with water and leaves the bag it becomes lighter and the cocaine bag floats to the surface to be recovered after the police/navy/coast guard leaves the area. Traffickers are employing various counter surveillance

techniques. Vessels known or suspected to carry drugs in the past are found to have none on board when intercepted. Rather in addition to the suspected narcotrafficker and crew is a lawyer. The lawyer takes note of the procedures followed by enforcement personnel and asks questions of the officers to determine the means by which they targeted that vessel among other investigative issues. These strategies are used to identify operational strategies and loopholes in the procedures followed by enforcement personnel. In some instances defense teams are raising issues related to international criminal law and human rights as a means to undermine the case against their client arrested for drug offences. In some instances the judiciary has accepted these arguments. The need for interagency and international cooperation and the speedy exchange of quality intelligence is further magnified by the challenges of high volume of recreation vessel traffic in this sub-region and large expanses of open water.

Central America

Much of the drugs in this area arrive by go fast and are then transported by land routes. As such, some countries in this sub-region have little or no activities focused on the control of maritime narcotrafficking. Some countries are noting an increase in the movement of drugs to ports in the region after having been transferred at sea from larger vessels to smaller ones. Containers are also being used by “contaminating” legitimate cargos through what is known as “rip on-rip off”. In some instances this is accomplished through internal conspiracies in the port. Some countries in this sub-region are encountering problems with the prosecution of cases involving maritime narcotrafficking. This comes largely from a failure by some judges to understand the special circumstances and complexities of maritime narcotrafficking interdiction. Defense attorneys are also using various strategies including the introduction of international law and human rights that do not necessarily apply but are being accepted by the judiciary. Others have encountered legal problems when damage has been caused during interdiction operations.



South America

Go fast boats and pleasure craft (sailing vessels) are being used to move drugs from the region through the Caribbean to Europe. Drugs heading to Europe are also originating in the Orinoco delta. A similar trend is being seen on the Pacific side as it relates to pleasure craft. Go fast boats are moving drugs to North America while sail boats are taking drugs to Australia. Fishing vessels are being used to transport drugs to Europe. More shipments are being seen to Europe and Africa and fewer to the US. Shipments involving smaller quantities of drugs are making their way to Europe from this sub-region by container using the “rip on rip off” technique. This is often taking place in smaller ports involving internal conspiracies.

Go fast boats and fishing vessels are being used to move drugs between countries in South America. Typically these are short trips involving small quantities of cocaine and marijuana. In some instances drugs are transferred to smaller vessels or transported through ports. While in the past Paraguay has been the source of marijuana for other countries in the area, more recently supplies of cocaine have been seen coming from this country. Increasingly clandestine labs for the conversion of cocaine paste to hydrochloride are being encountered in non-coca growing countries. In addition to cocaine some countries are seeing the arrival of synthetic drugs including New Psychoactive Substances (NPS). Synthetic and plant-based drugs arriving by maritime means are then moved over land and by air to their final destinations. Chemicals and precursors used to produce synthetic drugs are arriving by maritime means suggesting increased local production through clandestine laboratories.

As it has been seen in other sub-regions, human rights and international law are being used by defense attorneys as strategies to secure their client's release. Judges have responded in a positive manner in some of these cases. Some judges have also found it difficult to understand the special circumstances associated with maritime counterdrug enforcement activities including the occasional need for the use of force.