CHIP TRAILER USED TO SMUGGLE MARIJUANA ACROSS BORDER

Timber Security: trucking

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INTRODUCTION: Loaded and empty chip vans are a common sight moving across the US-Canadian border. In this instance, loaded chip vans were hauled from a sawmill in Washington state to a pulp mill in British Columbia. The empties were returned as a backhaul and dropped at the sawmill for reloading. Truck traffic, both empty and full vans, occurs on any day of the week and often after normal business hours.

SECURITY BREACH / DAMAGE: One Sunday, a U.S. customs agent decided to look in the back of an empty chip van bound from British Columbia to Washington. He discovered four hockey duffle bags in the bed of the van. Further examination determined that the bags contained 233 pounds of marijuana, valued at $650,000.

RECOGNITION: An alert customs agent decided to examine the empty van. Such searches were random and no previous search of a chip van at this crossing had proved so “fruitful.”

ACTIONS TAKEN: The truck driver, his truck and trailer, and the marijuana were detained. The marijuana was confiscated and destroyed. The truck driver was questioned and later released.

Later in the week a different truck driver for the same trucking company reported that when he delivered his empty trailer to the sawmill earlier on that Sunday he was met by two men in a sport utility vehicle. The men drove up to the truck and then seemed surprised that he was the driver. They then left the area. The driver did not get a description or license plate as he did not know of the situation at the border and did not feel that the situation was other than “curious.”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Realize that criminals are quick to take advantage of common, everyday activities if it will suit their purposes. In this case, the routine flow of chip vans across the border provided an opportunity and masked a drug smuggling operation. The smugglers did not expect the Customs agent to look in the back of the van. Only the diligence of the agent resulted in the discovery and confiscation of the drugs.

- Companies should incorporate a quick visual check of each rig “for unusual items” into the normal safety check given by drivers. In this case, the truck drivers admitted that they rarely looked into the vans, getting out of the tractors only long enough to hook up and do a quick safety check before hitting the road.

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COMMITTEE COMMENT: The incident brings up other concerns. While no company employees were involved in this incident, companies need to review continually their own screening and oversight policies of employees and contract truckers. The seriousness of this incident is also seen in two individuals in an SUV approaching the truck driver indicating a possible rendezvous. Accepting that the truck driver was investigated by law enforcement and determined not involved, there is still the concern for the safety of any truck driver being exposed to such interactions. Having a “suspicious vehicles form” available for all drivers to jot down curious instances such as the approach of the SUV would be valuable. (See Security Alert 2-Q-03, Use of a Suspicious Vehicle Report Form Assists in Investigations.)

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