

Three Australians Busted for Importing \$270M of Meth in Juice Bottles



"Juice bottles" full of liquid meth seized in Vancouver, B.C. (CBSA)

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Australian authorities have arrested three men in connection with a plot to import US\$270 million worth of liquid methamphetamine, the latest in a string of major container-smuggling busts for the world's most active and lucrative meth market.

The investigation began when Canada's Border Services Agency intercepted a containerized consignment arriving in Vancouver from Brazil. On inspection, the CBSA discovered more than a thousand bottles of "fruit juice" that were filled with 89 percent pure liquid methamphetamine (crystal methamphetamine dissolved in water). The shipment was ultimately bound for Australia, and the Canadian authorities alerted their Australian counterparts to the inbound illicit cargo. Before the container left Vancouver, the CBSA and Royal Canadian Mounted Police removed and replaced all of the methamphetamine with a harmless liquid, keeping the appearance of the shipment intact.

The container arrived in Brisbane by ship on September 3, and it was trucked to a property near Jimboomba, a suburb about 30 miles south of Brisbane. After the delivery, three local men were arrested and charged in connection with the shipment. If convicted on trafficking charges, the suspects could face up to life in prison. They were not working alone, according to the AFP: the Australian investigators believe that the shipment was arranged by an organized-crime syndicate.

"Transnational crime has no borders, as we live in an increasingly global and interconnected world," said RCMP Chief Superintendent Stephen Lee. "This is another example of working closely with our international partners and maintaining strong relationships with law enforcement agencies around the world."

Canada might seem like an unlikely location to stage a large-scale drug smuggling venture, as it is not a leading producer of any major class of harmful narcotics. However, the container terminal outside Vancouver, B.C. has become a major transshipment point for organized criminal gangs, according to the neighboring city of Delta, B.C. Canada disbanded its single-purpose port police division in 1997, and the container terminal is now patrolled by 14 different agencies with varying priorities and budgets.

"According to police intelligence, transnational organized crime groups are active within our ports. They use ports to export illicit commodities and take advantage of the low level of scrutiny of outgoing containers, which is even less than the scrutiny of incoming containers," security consultants for the City of Delta wrote last year. "[Vancouver] is open to transnational organized crime, having provided a staging point for Asian, South American, Mexican, and home-grown syndicates and cartels."

Criminal gangs have also used the Los Angeles port complex to ship meth from Mexico to Australia. Seven illicit shipments were assembled in a warehouse in LA in 2023, concealed within a variety of cargoes, like industrial machinery, furniture and carpets. These shipments - totaling about one tonne of meth - were seized by U.S. Customs before they could leave the country, and the LA Police Department arrested one local man in connection with the busts.