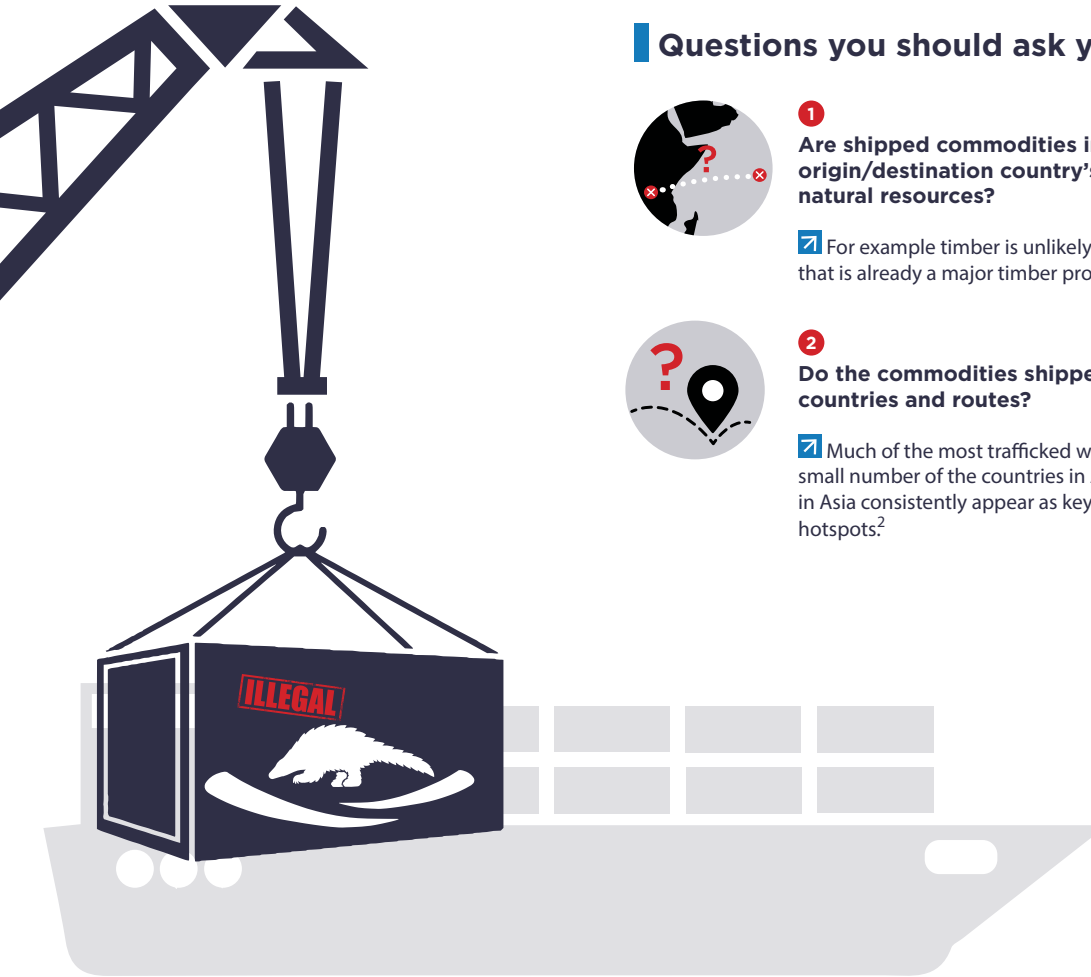


Red flags for suspicious illegal wildlife trade

Many indicators of suspicious cargo are common to all forms of contraband, including trafficked wildlife. High levels of corruption in countries or in ports should be considered a major overarching red flag, since traffickers will look to exploit these weaknesses.



Questions you should ask yourself to spot possible red flags:¹



1 Are shipped commodities incompatible with the origin/destination country's technical capacities or natural resources?

📌 For example timber is unlikely to be shipped to a country that is already a major timber producer and exporter.



2 Do the commodities shipped involve high-risk countries and routes?

📌 Much of the most trafficked wildlife originates in just a small number of the countries in Africa, while several locations in Asia consistently appear as key transit and destination hotspots.²



3 Are weight and cargo appearance inconsistent?

📌 For example, actual weights are different than those stated in the bill of lading or packing lists; declared weight is not reasonable or realistic for the declared commodity; and/or the appearance and characteristics of the shipment do not seem to match the description in the import declaration or other documentation.



4 Are cargo descriptions dubious, vague or misleading?

📌 Examples of vague or misleading descriptions for wildlife shipments include "fish", "shell", "horn" and "rosewood" (there are many species of rosewood, only some of which may be traded legally).



5 Does the value of cargo tally with its description and size?

📌 The value of cargo can help authorities determine whether the shipment is identical to what is declared.



6 Is the paperwork questionable?

📌 For example, are photocopies used instead of original documents? Are there spelling mistakes or inconsistencies? Is there a mismatch of permit number or date? Are documents expired? Is the official counter signature missing or do the documents seem altered (for example, look out for odd formatting, blurry text or cut and pasted logos).

¹ For sealed packed containers, the shipping line may not be able to determine several of the below red flags. Other parties in the supply chain may be able to do so as may Customs authorities when comparing the import declaration with the cargo manifest.

² For more information, see UNDP's flyer 'Overview of known trafficking routes, concealment methods and misdeclarations of wildlife products commonly trafficked in containerized sea cargo in recent years.'



7
Is the shipping route abnormal for the product and destination?

For example, a) the shipment makes no commercial sense, e.g. is sent via a long slow route involving multiple stops when more direct routes exist; b) the shipping costs are abnormally high compared to the declared cargo value; or c) the shipment has no clear market value in the destination country. Criminal networks also have been known to use multiple transshipments to hide the origin of shipments and make surveillance and traceability more difficult.



8
Was the shipping route changed after the ship left the port?

Change of destination or diversion of cargo is a legitimate procedure for commercial reasons but can be an indicator of illegal activities and an attempt to evade controls.



9
Was the Bill of Lading (B/L) switched?

This is when a shipper freight forwarder or shipping agent files a new Bill of Lading for a shipment that is already en route. This may occur for legitimate commercial reasons, but is also a common tactic used by traffickers to disguise information about the port of loading, port of discharge and routing of a shipment to reduce the likelihood that illegal shipments will be flagged for inspection or impede investigations if the contraband is seized.



10
Was the use of a Letter of Indemnity (LoI) requested without just cause?

This can be legitimate where, for instance, the voyage is too short to issue B/ Ls. However, the LoI can designate different receivers, consignees and B/L contents. It can therefore be used to evade enforcement agencies by using different receivers at short notice and to change the port of discharge.



11
Is the consignment split across multiple shipments?

The splitting of consignments may occur for legitimate reasons and purposes. However, it can also be a tactic used by traffickers to spread the risk of loss in case of interception by law enforcement. It is also used to more easily hide smaller illegal shipments within shipments of legitimate commodities. The illegal shipment may be spread across multiple containers under one booking or across multiple bookings.



12
Are Free Trade Zones or Free Ports used for the shipment?

The simplified import, export, transit and transshipment procedures and lax controls of free trade zones and free ports can make them prime sites for diversion of illegal shipments.



13
Is the shipper and consignee information false?

For example, look out for addresses that appear incomplete or overly simplistic (e.g., "1234 Main Street"); consignee names that are similar to large well-known companies; consignee addresses that are different to the businesses associated with the declared commodity.



14
Is a first-time shipper reluctant to offer information about their business and product end-use?

New customers should be subjected to thorough screening to rule out that they are shell companies created to obfuscate the actual ownership of the cargo.



15
Was shipment clearance requested last-minute by the shipper?

This might be an attempt to avoid Customs' controls due to time constraints.



16
Are payments made in cash?

Cash payments can be a legitimate payment method, but they can also be a sign of an illegal transaction since they are not traceable.

One risk indicator alone, or without additional information about the customer or transaction, is not likely to be sufficient to confirm there is an illegal activity. If you suspect something suspicious, ask the customer to provide you with more information and follow your company's Standard Operating Procedures. Companies are encouraged to consider using a system of green/orange/red lights for the indicators described that could help assess the overall risks and take action where required.



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