

According to the results, “it was from China,” Schapiro said. In November, 2017, CBP was the first agency to train its K-9s to detect fentanyl.

Following the strategy’s emphasis on communication and outreach, CBP held a weeklong fentanyl and opioid conference in June. The event drew a wide variety of law enforcement officers from across the country and internationally. They included Homeland Security Investigators from Cleveland, Houston and Beijing; drug enforcement agents from India and Thailand; members of the Justice Department, the FBI, the U.S. Postal Service; and representatives from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Participants networked and shared challenges facing their agencies. E-commerce dominated many of the discussions.

“Today you don’t need to be a car thief or commit robbery to pay for your habit,” said Michael Grote, a Homeland Security Investigations special agent from Brooklyn Heights, Ohio. He also explained

how traffickers make money just by repackaging a fentanyl order and resending it for a profit.

FBI Supervisory Special Agent Christopher Brest had perhaps the most intriguing presentation about the dark web. The dark web requires special software to access and contains a world of illicit trade, particularly in narcotics.

Brest showed an organization chart of a typical dark web drug trafficking outfit with a structure that looked more like a Wall Street corporation. The criminals are organized into departments (It even had a public affairs department!) all reporting to an administrator.

The dark web is difficult to shut down or even locate because servers are mostly overseas.

Communications are encrypted and anonymous and payments are in bitcoin making the supply chain difficult to trace, he said.

Nevertheless, collaboration can go a long way in disrupting the supply chain.



Roland Suliveras, the director of CBP's National Targeting Center's Cargo Division, leads a discussion at CBP's Fentanyl and Opioid Targeting Conference. Photo by Mike Pope

Attorney Leonard Le Vine with the U.S. Justice Department's Narcotics and Dangerous Drug Section makes a point during CBP's Fentanyl and Opioid Targeting Conference. Photo by Mike Pope



In May, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, with assistance from CBP and Homeland Security Investigations arrested a group of traffickers in Toronto who sold a variety of drugs through the dark web, including fentanyl, heroin and cocaine. CBP intercepted fentanyl shipments connected to the traffickers and the investigators provided photographic evidence, explained Suzanne Elkander, a Canada Border Services Agency agent who's assigned to the National Targeting Center.

“It’s amazing what four people and a computer can do,” she said.

The group is believed to have made several thousand illegal drug transactions throughout the world paid by bitcoin and then shipped to customers using the regular mail.

CBP worked with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in seizing sophisticated pill press machines that arrived at the Long Beach California, port of entry. The machines make pills that look like prescription medications and will be held until an investigation can show they have proper

registration, otherwise they’re illegal. Some presses can produce nearly 170,000 pills per minute, said Assistant Port Director Cheryl Davies who heads the port’s anti-terrorism contraband team.

In another joint operation, two Chinese nationals who sold and manufactured fentanyl throughout the U.S. were indicted after an investigation by the Justice Department. One of them operated at least two chemical plants in China that produced tons of fentanyl and fentanyl equivalents. CBP, along with the Ministry of Public Security of China provided “valuable investigative assistance,” according to the Justice Department.

CBP is part of the DEA Special Operations Division in Chantilly, Virginia, an interagency group that works internationally to combat drug traffickers and played a crucial role in the two indictments, said Leonard Le Vine, a trial attorney with the U.S. Justice Department’s Narcotics and Dangerous Drug Section. “By having CBP embedded, we can look at shipments and target what’s coming and going and link it to the suspects,” he said. “CBP is a vital and integral part of what we do.” ■