



WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DES DOUANES

Established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council
Créée en 1952 sous le nom de Conseil de coopération douanière

SCIENTIFIC SUB-COMMITTEE	41.677 E
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13th Session	O. ang.
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	SC-3

Brussels, 1 December 1997.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OR IMPROVEMENT OF CUSTOMS
LABORATORIES

(Item III. 1 on Agenda)

I. MISSION TO THE PHILIPPINES AND VIETNAM

1. As part of its continuing programme of providing assistance to Customs administrations with regard to the establishment or improvement of Customs laboratories, the Technical Attaché responsible for laboratory matters at the WCO Secretariat visited the Philippines and Vietnam in May 1997.
2. The mission to the Philippines was undertaken at the request of the Philippine Customs Administration in order to provide technical assistance concerning the improvement of the Customs laboratory. A summary of the mission report is set out at Annex I hereto.
3. The mission to Vietnam was also at the request of the Vietnamese Customs Administration. A summary of the mission report is set out at Annex II hereto.
4. In this regard, attention is invited to the recommendations in the mission reports (see Annexes I and II), where further technical assistance requirements of these Administrations have been highlighted.
5. The Secretariat would urge developed country administrations to seriously consider providing possible assistance to these Administrations.

File No. 2134

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II. DEMAND FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

6. The Secretariat receives requests from many administrations for technical assistance concerning Customs laboratories. As mentioned at the previous sessions of the Scientific Sub-Committee, these requests can be categorized into the following four groups:
- (i) Supply of information on the planning of Customs laboratories;
 - (ii) Supply of information on analytical methods;
 - (iii) Training of personnel; and
 - (iv) Supply of equipment, etc.
7. As far as (i) and (ii) are concerned, the first edition of the Customs Laboratory Guide would be a useful guidance book for developing-country administrations.
8. The Secretariat would be able to provide more information on analytical methods in the second edition of the Customs Laboratory Guide, which will contain typical examples of analyses being compiled on the basis of information received from many Members. These will be particularly useful to laboratory chemists who do not have sufficient experience and skills in laboratory analysis for HS classification purposes. It would also be helpful in promoting the exchange of laboratory information and techniques between Customs laboratories. The Secretariat wishes to continue to compile more details of typical examples of analyses. Administrations are therefore requested to provide the Secretariat with further information in this area.
9. With regard to (iii) and (iv) in paragraph 6 above, the Secretariat is not in a position to help because of resource constraints. However, the Secretariat is willing to act as an intermediary in arranging technical assistance in these areas between administrations on a bilateral basis. Administrations interested in providing assistance (donors) are requested to contact to the Secretariat.

III. CONCLUSION

10. The Scientific Sub-Committee is invited to take note of the above information and comments.

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDING IMPROVEMENT
OF THE CUSTOMS LABORATORY IN THE PHILIPPINES

I. Observations

1. Organization of Bureau of Customs

Under the Commissioner of Customs, there are four Groups: the Customs Revenue Collection & Monitoring Group, the Customs Assessment & Operations Co-ordinating Group, the Intelligence and Enforcement Group and the Internal Administration Group. The Customs Laboratory belongs to the Valuation and Classification Division of the Import Assessment Service of the Customs Assessment & Operations Co-ordinating Group.

2. Role of the Philippine Customs Laboratory

2.1 Providing analysis service

The Customs Laboratory provides analysis services in response to requests for examinations from the Headquarters and from the regional Customs offices throughout the Philippines.

2.2 Support of enforcement activities

Another important function of the Laboratory is analysis of suspect goods to determine whether they contain illicit drugs.

3. Criteria for referring samples to Customs laboratory

Samples are referred to the Customs Laboratory to ensure correct identification in order to facilitate uniform application of the HS-based Customs tariff, to safeguard revenue; and to ensure compliance with prohibitions and restrictions.

4. Profile of Customs Laboratory

4.1 History of Customs Laboratory

The Customs Laboratory was re-established on 21 June 1993.

4.2 Organization

The Customs Laboratory consists of the Administrative Officers and Operations Officers.

The Administrative Officers are the Computer Operator and the Receiving/Releasing Clerk.

The Operations Officers are Chemists III, II, I, Laboratory Technicians and Laboratory Aides.

4.3 Location and infrastructure

The Customs Laboratory is located in Manila, on the second floor of the Valuation and Classification Division.

The Laboratory has eight separate analysis rooms (e.g., instrument room, physical test room, chemical analysis room, balance room, IR-room, etc.).

4.4 Kinds of samples referred to Customs laboratory

The main samples analysed are:

- A. Polymers/plastics
- B. Oils-mineral/petroleum and natural/essential oils
- C. Organic and inorganic chemicals
- D. Food and food products
- E. Surface-active preparations
- F. Textile products
- G. Metals/alloys.

Since the Customs Laboratory does not have sufficient facilities, most analyses (e.g., analysis of the carbon content in metal, analysis of essential oils by GC-MS, etc.) are carried out by other institutions. The Philippine Customs Administration has special agreements with those institutions for the analysis of goods.

4.5 Instruments and equipment

The Customs Laboratory purchased the following instruments and equipment when it was re-established, but some of those are not actually available now.

- A. Fourier Transform Infrared Spectrometer
- B. Gel Permeation Chromatograph
- C. Density Meter
- D. Distilling apparatus
- E. Electronic balance
- F. Centrifuge
- G. Water bath
- H. Isotemp. Oven
- I. Microscope
- J. Stirrer/hotplate

II. Recommendations

1. General

It would seem very important to maintain good communication between field officers and the Customs Laboratory chemists on the role of the Customs Laboratory and its analysis capabilities. Field officers need to understand the important role of the Customs Laboratory so that they can make more effective use of it for HS classification and enforcement purposes.

2. Equipment

Some basic but essential items of equipment and instruments are not available. In order to meet requests for analyses from Headquarters and field Customs officers, the following equipment and instruments should be procured: Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectroscopy (GC-MS) with built-in library; ICP Emission Spectrometer; Gas Chromatograph; FT-IR with built-in library; High performance liquid chromatograph; Tensionmeter; pH meter; Test sieves (various mesh)

If other tasks such as tests related to valuation, narcotics, etc., are to be carried out, additional equipment and instruments will be necessary.

3. Anti-pollution measures

Waste liquids, including heavy metals, should be kept separately in tanks according to the kind of substance and should not be released into the normal drainage system after dilution of the solutions.

Hazardous, harmful or volatile materials should be stored separately in cool dark places. Dangerous reagents should be stored in a lockable cabinet. An exhaust gas cleaner should also be installed.

4. Other

Training of chemists (especially newly-employed chemists) in an advanced Customs laboratory to study analysis methods for Customs purposes is desirable.

Reference samples and standard samples should be provided or procured for the Customs Laboratory, to permit identification of unknown materials.

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDING IMPROVEMENT OF
CUSTOMS LABORATORIES IN VIETNAM

I. Observations

1. Organization

The General Department of Vietnamese Customs is located directly under the Government. Under the Director General of Customs, there are four Deputy Director General and 12 Departments. The Customs Laboratories in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City come under the Department of Research.

2. Role of the Vietnamese Customs Laboratories

2.1 Providing analysis service

The Vietnamese Customs Laboratories (in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City) provide analysis services in response to requests for examinations from Customs offices throughout Vietnam.

2.2 Support of enforcement activities

Another important function is the analysis of suspect goods to determine whether they contain illicit drugs.

2.3 Study of scientific matters

The work of the Customs Laboratories is not confined merely to analyses; it also involves a considerable volume of research for scientific-related Customs work (e.g. research concerning control methods for illicit drugs, etc.)

3. Criteria for referring samples to the Laboratories

Samples are referred to the Customs Laboratories for the following purposes :

- (1) Correct identification in order to determine the appropriate tariff heading and valuation.
- (2) To check prohibitions and restrictions.
- (3) Analyses of illicit drugs.

4. Profile of Customs Laboratories

4.1 History of Customs Laboratories

Vietnamese Customs has only recently established the Customs Laboratories and started Customs analysis work.

4.2 Organization and staff

There is a staff of 25, including 20 engineers in the fields of pharmacochemistry, fabrics, motor vehicles, precious stones, etc.

4.3 Location and infrastructure

The Customs Laboratories are located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

The Customs laboratory in Hanoi (800m²) has an instrument room, physical test room, chemical analysis room, balance room, library, etc.

The Customs Laboratory in Ho Chi Minh City (100m²) also has an instrument room, physical test room, chemical analysis room, balance room, library, etc.

4.4 Kinds of samples referred to the Customs laboratories

The main samples analysed are

- A. Goods most susceptible to fraud, e.g., fabrics, paper, chemicals, cooking oil, petroleum, cars, etc.
- B. Drugs
- C. Certification documents (e.g., origin), foreign currency

4.5 Instruments and equipment

In the Vietnamese Customs Laboratories, analyses are currently carried out using the following instruments: Docubox machine; Analytical balance; pH Meter; Titrator; Viscometer; Heating & drying oven; Biofuge; Furnace; Evaporator; Bi-distillation apparatus, etc.

II. Recommendation

1. General

As Vietnamese Customs has only recently established the Customs Laboratories, the next one or two years will be an extremely important period for the Customs Laboratory as it introduces an efficient analysis system and establishes the important role of analysis work in Vietnamese Customs.

Since there is a need for more experience and know-how in Customs analysis work, it would seem important for the Vietnamese Customs Laboratories to:

- Send staff on mission to study the infrastructure of other Customs Laboratories;
- Obtain training in other Customs Laboratories.

In this connection, the Customs Laboratory Guide should also prove very useful.

2. Equipment and instruments

In order to meet requests for analysis from Headquarters and field Customs officers, the following basic equipment and instruments should be procured as soon as possible: FT-IR (with standard library); GC; UV-VIS; X-ray diffractometer; GC-MS (with standard library); AAS; HPLC.

3. Literature (See Customs Laboratory Guide I/C3)

Certain analytical methods (e.g. ISO Standards, AOAC methods) and technical references should be procured, if required.

4. Establishment of analytical methods

In order to facilitate laboratory work, it would be desirable to establish recommended analytical methods should be established in Vietnam. In this connection, Section II (Quantitative criteria in the Harmonized System requiring laboratory analysis) and Section III (Recommended analytical methods) of the Customs Laboratory Guide should be very useful.

5. Anti-pollution measures

Waste liquids, including heavy metals, should be kept separately in sink tanks after use and should not be released into the normal drainage system even if the solutions are diluted.

At present, no serious problems exist in this regard, but the anti-pollution measures will be needed for hazardous, harmful or volatile materials.

6. Other

Since the Vietnamese Customs Laboratories have only recently started analysis work, the chemists need to acquire experience and know-how in Customs analysis work. A period of training in an advanced Customs Laboratory to study analysis methods and work for Customs purposes would therefore be desirable.

It would also seem important to study the infrastructure of other Customs Laboratories.

It would seem very important to maintain good communication between field officers and the Customs Laboratory chemists on the role of the Customs Laboratory and its analysis capabilities. Field officers need to understand the important role of the Customs Laboratory so that they can make more effective use of it for HS classification and enforcement purposes.

Reference samples and standard samples should be provided or procured for the Customs Laboratories to permit identification of unknown materials.