

## Thailand Joins Forces With Interpol, WHO Taskforce To Fight Invasion Of Counterfeit Drugs

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SHANGHAI - Thailand's pharmaceutical industry is helping inform the citizenry about the dangers of counterfeit medicines as the country joins forces with groups including Interpol, the World Health Organization's anti-counterfeiting taskforce, and the United States Pharmacopeia to combat an invasion of fake drugs.

In one joint effort, the Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers Association (PReMA) of Thailand and the Japan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association recently co-hosted a seminar on counterfeit drugs in order to raise awareness about the problem, which is widespread in Thailand.

Thailand's Deputy Commerce Minister Alongkorn Polabutr, along with leaders of the Intellectual Property and Customs departments, the Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Special Investigation all attended the seminar.

PReMA CEO Kitima Yuthavong said many members of the group are concerned about the issue; PReMa is collaborating with government agencies to battle counterfeits in its capacity as an alliance of manufacturers.

"It is difficult to determine the number of counterfeit drugs in Thailand, since Thailand does not have what we call active pharmaceutical ingredient manufacturing companies," Clemence Gautier, a Bangkok-based consultant with the law firm Tilleke & Gibbins International, told *PharmAsia News*.

Though exact figures on the damage inflicted upon the Thai pharmaceutical industry and public are not available, WHO forecasts that the value of counterfeit drugs across the world will hit \$75 billion by next year, said Thavirap Tantiwongse, director of health system partnerships at PReMA.

PReMA President Teera Chakajnarodom added that the 10,000 or so drug

stores across the country face the increasing risk of becoming channels for counterfeit medications.

"In Thailand, we can find mainly erectile dysfunction drugs, and a raid on Oct. 6, 2009 by the Department of Special Investigation led to a seizure of 40 items, including Viagra and Tamiflu, for a total value of THB 25 million [\$751,314]," said Gautier.

Gautier stated in a note entitled "New MOU Targets Counterfeit Drugs in Thailand" that most of the counterfeit drugs now present in Thailand are manufactured in other countries that include China, India, Pakistan and Vietnam.

"Thailand acts as a transshipment hub for these products before they are further distributed into the world market. As a result of this role as a gateway for such goods, there is a certain amount of seepage of fake drugs into the Thai market," Gautier said in the note.

Thailand has participated in WHO's International Medical Product Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce program since 2007, together with Interpol, in order to coordinate, expand and strengthen the crackdown on counterfeit drugs.

In November 2008, Interpol said that police across Southeast Asia had made 27 arrests in nearly 200 raids carried out with the support of the WHO and the World Customs Organization officials across Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and seized fake drugs worth \$6.6 million.

Thai health authorities also recently entered into a partnership with the United States Pharmacopeial Convention to train professionals across Thailand to test for counterfeit medicines ([PharmAsia News, Oct. 14, 2009](#)).

However, PReMA's Thavirap said that involved Thai government agencies have not been able to solve the counterfeiting problem because the current penalties are not strong enough, and added that dealing in fake drugs can be very profitable.

Thailand's Food and Drug Administration is planning to increase fines on importers, sellers and manufacturers of fake drugs. Last year, the Thai FDA proposed amending the law so that manufacturers can be fined up to THB 5 million (\$150,000) while importers and sellers can be fined up to THB 2 million (\$60,000).

A memorandum of understanding was signed last year by the Department of Intellectual Property, the Customs Department, the Royal Thai Police, the Department of Special Investigation and PReMA, entitled "Operation to Prevent and Suppress Drugs Violating Intellectual Property."

"The MoU should contribute to coordinating the work of these different agencies and slow down the access to counterfeit drugs in Thailand," said Gautier.

"More consumers will be duped into buying fake drugs unless the law is tightened up," Thavirap said. "Greater cooperation from the private sector is also needed to increase the detection and arrests of pharmaceutical bootleggers."

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