

MALTA STAR

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Police close to "solve" Malta-link on counterfeit drugs

European-wide investigations on counterfeit meds

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The Malta Police fraud squad is taking part in a European-wide investigation into counterfeit medicine of which around 400 packets have been found in Malta.

The investigations are at a very advanced stage and the police will be solving the case in the next few weeks, when the results of examinations on the pills from foreign laboratories arrive in Malta.

Drug not intended for Malta

The drug, Plavix 75mg coated tablets, arrived in Malta on the 7 December 2006 and was stored at the Customs Warehouse of the Malta Freeport. The medicine was not intended to be sold in Malta were on the way to a country outside Europe.



A spokesperson for the Maltese company which imports the Plavix said that the company realised that the packaging of the medicine was not as usual and suspected foul play. The medicine was put in quarantine right away. The company said it alerted the local Medicine watchdog immediately.

The police searched the warehouse on 14 December 2006 and a sensitive magisterial inquiry, led by Magistrate Tonio Vella was launched.

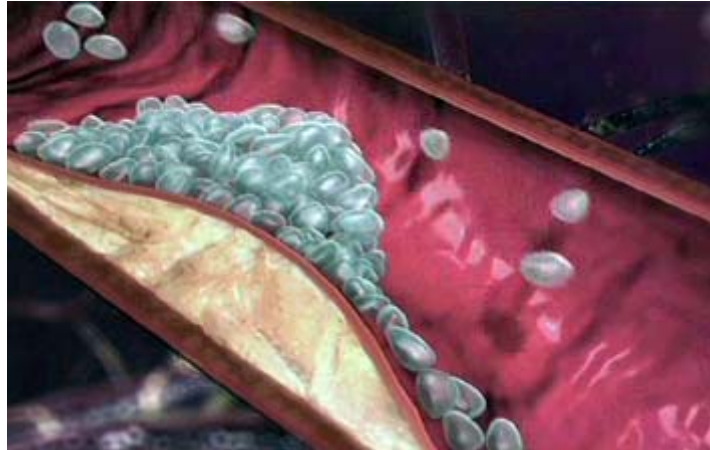
France, UK and Switzerland

The company spokesperson said that they cooperated with the authorities from the very beginning and also made available the necessary documentation for "full traceability".

The same alleged counterfeited items were also distributed in larger quantities across Europe – In France, United Kingdom and Switzerland.

This has alerted medicine authorities across Europe and European-wide investigation was launched by the Interpol. The medicine probably comes from the same source, a large medicine distributor in the UK.

Malta is generally used as a hub because of the central location of the Malta Freeport, said sources in the medicine industry.



French authority warning

A drug alert notification was issued by the French Regulatory Authority on the 8 February 2007. The local Medicines Authority has on its part relayed the drug alert for two batches of Plavix 75mg coated tablets in Malta.

“As a result a batch recall of the above mentioned batches has been initiated in France,” said the medicines watchdog. The same notification said that: “Pharmacists, responsible persons and qualified persons are instructed to immediately notify the Medicines Authority, and withhold from sale, any unusual packs of Plavix 75mg bearing the above mentioned batch numbers [3051, 3091].”

Police sources had told maltastar.com at the end of January, when this e-newspaper first revealed the case, that samples of the medicine were sent to foreign laboratories in the UK, US and Germany for further examinations.

The same sources said that in the next few weeks, the last results will reach the police headquarters to conclude the investigations.

Prevents heart attack

Plavix is made of Clopidogrel and is used to prevent heart attacks and strokes in persons with heart disease (recent heart attack, unstable angina), recent stroke, or blood circulation disease (peripheral vascular disease.) It works by blocking certain blood cells called platelets and prevents them from forming harmful blood clots. This “anti-platelet” effect helps to keep blood flowing smoothly in the body.

<http://www.maltastar.com/pages/msFullArt.asp?an=11348>