

Smugglers Implanted Drugs in Puppies, DEA Says

New drug-trafficking method discovered during two-year investigation.

Labrador Retriever puppies were surgically implanted with heroin and used as couriers by drug smugglers, the Drug Enforcement Administration said.

The puppies were one of several creative smuggling methods used by a Columbian drug ring that transported narcotics to Miami and New York City, authorities said. The agency announced Wednesday that it had arrested 22 people in separate raids, following a two-year investigation.

The purebred dogs were found during one drug seizure at a Columbian farm in 2005, according to the Associated Press. A veterinarian had sewn liquid heroin packets into the bellies of six puppies, and four others had not yet been impregnated. Three of the puppies later died of infections from the surgery, but officials in Columbia say that the others are healthy.

Police in Columbia adopted three dogs, and one is being trained to sniff for drugs, the AP reported.

The organizations outrageous and heinous smuggling method of implanting heroin inside puppies is a true indication of the extent that drug dealers go to make their profit, said John P. Gilbride, the DEA special agent who heads the New York field office and led the investigation.

In 14 seizures, drug agents found 24 kilograms of heroin and six grams of cocaine distributed by the organization, which is based in Medellin, Columbia. Officials say that in addition to the puppies, smugglers used human couriers, called swallows, who had ingested heroin packets. Heroin was also found in body creams, aerosol cans, pressed into beads, and sewn into the lining of purses and luggage.

Posted: Feb. 2, 2006, 4 p.m. EST