



SWEET SUCCESS: Reg Horne, of Justicia Investigations, whose detective work led to the breakup of a major syndicate involved in the theft of tons of export sugar valued at over R250 000.

Smashing the sugar syndicate

The theft of sugar has long been a problem for the industry, writes Daily News Crime Reporter MARVIN MEINTJIES.

THE recent discovery of a syndicate stealing tons of sugar in transit to the South African Sugar Association's (Sasa) export terminal in Durban has resulted in tighter controls. Hundreds of thousands of rands have been lost by Sasa and the stolen sugar is repackaged and slipped into the local market by the syndicate.

Several months ago the thefts were picked up by management who contracted private agency, Justicia Investigations, to help them crack the case.

Former policemen Reg Horne and Peter Kitshoff's investigations led to the unearthing of a network of graft and corruption which resulted in the arrest of one sugar association employee, one sub-contracted

THE recent discovery of a syndicate stealing tons of sugar in transit to the South African Sugar Association's (Sasa) export terminal in Durban has resulted in tighter controls.

Hundreds of thousands of rands have been lost by Sasa and the stolen sugar is repackaged and slipped into the local market by the syndicate.

Several months ago the thefts were picked up by management who contracted private agency, Justicia Investigations, to help them crack the case.

Former policemen Reg Horne and Peter Kitshoff's investigations led to the unearthing of a network of graft and corruption which resulted in the arrest of one sugar association employee, one sub-contracted owner/driver tasked to transport sugar and four illegal aliens.

Police are still searching for the owner of a Pietermaritzburg warehouse at which 102 tons of stolen sugar was recovered.

Mr Horne explained how a syndicate operated.

He said: "Autonet is contracted to transport sugar from the Illovo refinery in Noodsberg to the terminal. Autonet in turn employs sub-contractors on an affirmative action basis, mainly owner-drivers of trucks, to assist in transporting the sugar.

"One of these guys will make contact with a guy at the Sasa terminal."

Sugar is picked up from the refinery and never delivered to the terminal, but the syndicate's contact will still sign for goods never received.

Packets

The sugar can then be repackaged in ordinary brown or white paper packets easily obtainable and marked "white sugar" and sold below price domestically.

This undercuts the market as the sugar is meant to be exported and not sold locally. It is also sold at a much lower price to retailers "willing to deal with these types of people", said Mike Edwards, of Sasa.

Mr Edwards said although the amount recovered from the alleged syndicate in Pietermaritzburg, 102 tons valued at R250 000, seemed large, it was not if one compared it with the one million tons exported annually. Some of the stolen sugar has already been repacked and sold locally.

"So the impact is small in relation to the local market of 1.2 million tons and export market of one million tons," he said.

Mr Edwards was full of praise for the work of the private investigators and the co-operation received from the police's Serious Violent Crime unit.

"The transporters were also very co-operative and helped us get to the bottom of this and smash this syndicate."

Although the theft did not have a severe impact on the industry, it was still "serious" and Sasa had since taken steps to "tighten controls of the process" of shipping.

The Sasa employee, the owner-driver and four illegal aliens, who were allegedly locked in a cell-like room with burglar guards, no toilet facilities and no food, and made to repack sugar throughout the night, have all been held in custody since their arrest at the weekend.

A bail hearing will be held tomorrow in the Durban Magistrate's Court.

The owner of the warehouse, at which the sugar was recovered and the packers arrested, is still being sought for questioning by police.