# National Crime Agency freezes over £1 million in crackdown on high street crime



In a significant crackdown on organised crime, the National Crime Agency (NCA) has frozen bank accounts amounting to over £1 million following extensive raids on more than 250 barbershops and other high street businesses across the UK. This operation, termed "Operation Machinize," was initiated to combat high street crime linked to money laundering activities.

Over the course of three weeks, officers conducted raids at 265 premises, resulting in 35 arrests. The operation also led to the safeguarding of 97 individuals due to concerns surrounding modern slavery. The NCA reported the seizure of £40,000 in cash, alongside 200,000 illicit cigarettes, 7,000 packs of tobacco, and over 8,000 illegal vaping products. Additionally, authorities uncovered two cannabis farms that contained a total of 150 plants. In light of these findings, ten shops were closed, with further closures anticipated as the investigations progress.

Rachael Hebert, deputy director of the National Economic Crime Centre at the NCA, emphasised the breadth of criminal activities uncovered during the operation. “Operation Machinize targeted barbershops and other high street businesses being used as cover for a whole range of criminality, all across the country,” she stated. Hebert outlined the connections found between these businesses and various forms of serious crime, including drug trafficking, organised immigration crime, modern slavery, human trafficking, firearms offences, and the illicit trade of tobacco and vapes. She added, “We know cash-intensive businesses are used as fronts for money laundering, facilitating some of the highest harm and highest-impact offending in the UK.”

The security minister, Dan Jarvis, also commented on the implications of such criminal activities, stating that the raids illustrate “the scale and complexity of the criminality our towns and cities face.” He expressed his commitment to ensuring that those responsible for such actions are brought to justice. According to estimates from the NCA, approximately £12 billion in criminal cash is generated annually in the UK, with a significant portion either smuggled abroad or laundered through legitimate financial channels.

The NCA's report indicates that businesses operating in cash-intensive sectors, including barbershops, vape shops, nail bars, and even American-themed sweet shops, have frequently been exploited by criminals to obscure the origins of illegally obtained cash. These businesses are often purchased by crime syndicates using illicit funds, providing a façade of legitimacy that helps to facilitate money laundering operations.

In line with these concerns, the Labour Party has previously included a commitment in its general election manifesto to crack down on “dodgy” sweet shops, amidst ongoing investigations into tax evasion and the sale of counterfeit goods.

Operation Machinize was a large-scale initiative involving 19 different police forces and regional organised crime units, as well as several national agencies, including HMRC, Trading Standards, and Home Office Immigration Enforcement. The collaborative effort highlights the concerted approach law enforcement agencies are taking to address high street crime and its broader implications for communities across the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)