

Mexican troops seize 2.6 tonnes of marijuana in bananas

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MEXICO CITY — First bricks of cocaine were found stashed in statues of the Virgin Mary, then in a frozen shark. Now, Mexican authorities have seized a load of "over-ripe" bananas bearing 2.6 tonnes of marijuana.

Mexico's defense ministry said Wednesday the cargo was found hidden inside a truck by soldiers who caught a whiff of pot when they stopped the vehicle at a US border checkpoint, around 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Tucson, Arizona.

The soldiers "realized that the product (bananas) was over-ripe" and decided to poke around under the fruit, where they discovered 508 packages of marijuana weighing some 2,650 kilograms (5,830 pounds), the ministry said in a statement.

The driver, who was arrested, had driven the truck from Mexican City and was bound for Tijuana, where a busier border crossing point provided access to the United States, according to the ministry.

The government has deployed nearly 50,000 soldiers to counter powerful cartels whose turf battles have claimed more than 14,000 lives since President Felipe Calderon took office in December 2006.

Amid the crackdown, Mexican traffickers have sought increasingly innovative -- some would say bizarre -- ways to try and smuggle drugs across the border, including the use of home-made semi-submersibles.

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