

# To catch a criminal

Since the advent of fingerprinting, police have sought ways to ensure the guilt of law breakers. Steven Antalics looks at the newest technology from the UK that is strengthening Dutch law enforcement.



Photo: SelectaDNA

Since 2004, the UK's SelectaDNA has offered a DNA Spray product that marks perpetrators with a synthetic DNA marker. That marker, an invisible glue-like substance, adheres for weeks to clothing, hair and skin. It is nearly impossible to remove and allows for easy identification by police, as the marker is only visible under UV light.

How the technology came to be deployed in the Netherlands was largely by chance. Simon Nab, a police officer in Rotterdam, was on a trip to the UK when he first encountered the DNA Spray technology.

Seeing the potential for its use back home, he quickly went to work setting up a company to help import the technology. Nab now works for Rhine Group, a sister company to Rhine Consulting Group, which is SelectaDNA's distributor for the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany.

"It wasn't so much them choosing us

as us choosing them," Nab says of distribution, noting demographic similarities between the Netherlands and the UK that make the country an ideal place to implement such a system.

Beginning in 2008, several businesses, universities and community housing developments in the Netherlands began trials of the DNA Spray anti-theft devices. Among them are the Erasmus University, Schiedam schools, the Jan Linders supermarket chain, McDonald's and the Hermitage Museum in Amsterdam.

Communities and businesses have also begun adopting the system in Rot-

terdam, Utrecht, Breda, Zoetermeer, Leiden, and as of March, the Amsterdam communities of Slotervaart and Geuzenveld.

Many shop-keepers and police in areas using the DNA Spray technology have reported a noticeable drop in burglaries and break-ins after deploying the system, from single-digit decreases to figures less than half those previously recorded.

De Telegraaf reported the first arrest directly attributable to the system on 15 March in The Hague when a suspect attempted to break into a decoy car outfitted with DNA Spray technology.

Police apprehended the suspect, who had been marked with the spray and further identified by video from a camera hidden in the decoy vehicle. Though that case is still pending, Nab expresses confidence in the DNA Spray evidence.

"We discussed the use of this with many attorneys and judges - basically everyone," Nab says. "We walked through the entire timeline, starting with someone being sprayed."

As the technology is so new, there is no case law in the Netherlands regarding its application and any potential legal issues that may arise from such a theft countermeasure. However, there are several safeguards in place that reduce the likelihood anyone will be incorrectly sprayed, let alone convicted.

First, there are multiple SelectaDNA products which can be used as evidence. In addition to the DNA Spray, the company also offers DNA Gel and Grease for marking indoor and outdoor valuables. Such marking is, in a legal sense, little different than including marked bills in banks to trace money stolen in a heist.

Second, the system has multiple

layers to avoid any mistaken spraying of bystanders. The set-up includes a mix of devices, including Radio-Frequency Identification chips, a voice/aggression analysis system and a last-resort panic button.

All of those systems can arm the DNA Spray, but only when the final motion-sensitive trigger is activated will the system actually spray a suspect.

The SelectaDNA evidence can only ever be corroborative - no one can be convicted without additional, more traditional forensic evidence such as video evidence, eyewitness testimony, and so forth. Therefore, even if a bystander were accidentally sprayed, there would need to be further corroborating evidence for police to make an arrest.

The presence of DNA evidence makes a rather strong case, Nab points out. For starters, most burglaries by nature take place when businesses or homes are empty, reducing any chance of a mis-fire.

Also, the DNA evidence is accepted and analysed by VeriLabs in Leiden, one of only four labs that operate with the forensic accreditation of the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands.

The fine mist deployed when the system is triggered is also safety approved. It contains synthetic, not human DNA.

Though each system is uniquely coded, the few dozen base molecules from which the spray is fabricated are too short to create even a sequence for a virus, let alone a human gene.

In addition to its deployment in the Netherlands, SelectaDNA technologies have been used or trialed in England, Scotland, Wales, the British Virgin Islands, New Zealand, Germany, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Greece and Chile.

## Prize nomination for Wilders

**STRASBOURG** | PVV MP Barry Madlener has nominated Geert Wilders for the Sakharov Prize given by the European Parliament to those who stand for free speech. In his 7 July announcement, Madlener said, "It's a shame that someone in one European country is being prosecuted for a fundamental right like free speech." He referred to the controversy surrounding Wilders' anti-Islamic film, Fitna. The prestigious prize has previously been given to Nelson Mandela, the Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Belarus opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich.

## Many Wesley's born in June

**AMSTERDAM** | The name Wesley was chosen often in June, with nearly twice as many parents as usual naming sons Wesley than in the previous month. The increase was revealed in a quarterly report from Sociale Verzekeringsbank on 8 July. Whether the increase is related to the performance of Oranje footballer Wesley Sneijder and the World Cup championships is hard to say. The number of boys named Robin and Martin for example, remained the same. Lucas is currently the most popular boys name in the Netherlands, Sophie is the most often chosen girls name.

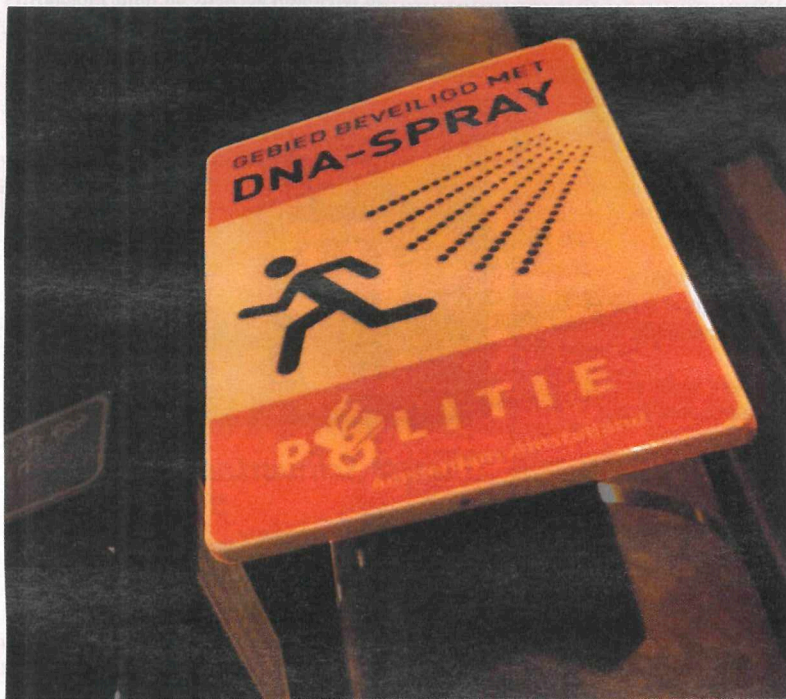
## Cicada bug discovered

**HILVERSUM** | The 'kraakcicade' or cicada bug, has been discovered for the first time in the Netherlands. The bug was found in the tree roots of imported elms from France. Based on research of the bug's larvae, biologist Baudewijn Ode on July 27 says four males bugs have been discovered in the country, some of which were found in a tree planted near the Amsterdam Hermitage museum. Known as July Flies, cicadas are named after the sound they produce, which can ring at 120 decibels. They are among the loudest of all insects and the most widely recognised.



## Two beers for skippers

**THE HAGUE** | The Ministry of Transport and Water management on 24 July lowered the blood alcohol content (BAC) restrictions for skippers from 0.8 to 0.5, or the equivalent of two beers. The new BAC requirements stand for all sailing on major rivers and other waters. A BAC of 0.5 is the same limit as that laid out for drivers. With the new act, the Netherlands meets the standards of surrounding countries, saying sailors must be on "sharp alert" when on the water. The new limit applies to both recreational and professional sailors.



Areas that employ DNA Spray report a drastic drop in criminal activity. Photo: Wikipedia

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