



## *Joint Interagency Task Force South*

### *Fact Sheet*

#### **Self-Propelled Semi-Submersible (SPSS)**

**Dimensions:** 40-80 feet in length with a freeboard (exposed area above the waterline) of approximately 18 inches.

**Composition:** Fiberglass/wood or steel. Usually takes upwards of 1 yr to build.

**Propulsion:** Self-propelled; single or twin diesel engines; 1500 or more gallon fuel capacity

**Speed:** 6+ knots

**Range:** Approx 2,000 miles

**Capacity:** 4 persons, 4 to 12 metric tons of cocaine.

**Control:** Human or Remote Control

**Cost:** Approx \$2 million (USD)

**Prevalence:** We assess the use of SPSS vessels has grown in recent years as a means to counter effective U.S. drug interdiction efforts. Since 2006, there have been multiple known SPSS events. Drug traffickers continue to adapt to law enforcement successes. The SPSS, once perceived as an impractical and risky smuggling tool, has proven successful as an innovative and highly mobile, asymmetrical method of conveyance.

**History:** Traffickers have experimented with primitive semi-submersibles since the early 1990s. First constructed of fiberglass and wood, the first generation of SPSS vessels were limited in range and capacity. However, as DTOs advanced their techniques, newer generations of the SPSS, built from steel, can carry larger loads and can travel much further than previous assessed. The SPSS is not a true submersible, it is a surface vessel with a very low freeboard.

**Routes:** To date, the SPSS has been confined as an Eastern Pacific problem set; operating equatorially from South and Central America.

**Perspectives:** *"What worries me [about the SPSS] is if you can move that much cocaine, what else can you put in that semi-submersible. Can you put a weapon of mass destruction in it?"* **Adm. Jim Stavridis, Commander, U.S. Southern Command**





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*"Every time we turn around, the smugglers are extraordinarily creative, extraordinarily adaptive"*  
**Rear Adm. Joseph L. Nimmich,**  
**Commander, JIATF-South**

*"I worry a little bit about how we as a government are able to focus on this (CD) mission,"* **Adm. Michael Mullen,**  
**CJCS**

*"This enemy is supremely intelligent and has lots of money. It shows that the narco-traffickers are betting on this method."* **Edgar Cely, Colombian Navy Admiral**

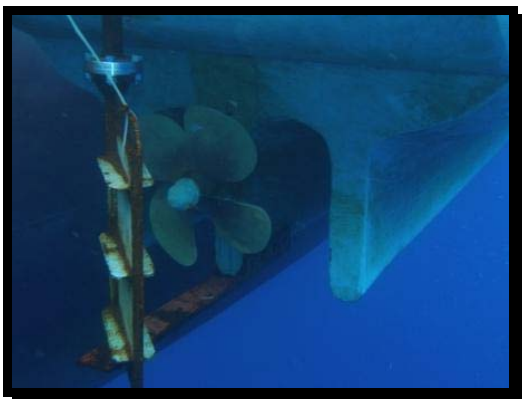
*"What's most striking is the logistical capacity of these criminals to take all this material into the heart of the jungle, including heavy equipment like propulsion gear and generators,"*  
**Colombian Navy Capt. Gustavo Angel,** **Commander, COLNAV 18th Vessel Flotilla**



Many SPSS are built in sites several miles upstream in river tributaries under the cover of jungle canopy



A view from inside a suspected SPSS construction site



Underwater Photo of an SPSS propeller

