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Mafia 'sank nuclear waste ship'



Underwater footage of the sunken ship that could contain nuclear waste

By Duncan Kennedy

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A shipwreck that could contain nuclear waste is being investigated by authorities in Italy amid claims that it was deliberately sunk by the mafia.

An informant told a judge the ship was one of a number he blew up as part of an illegal operation to bypass rules on the disposal of toxic waste.

The sunken vessel has been found 30km (18 miles) off the south-west of Italy.

Murky pictures taken by a robot camera show the vessel intact and alongside it are a number of yellow barrels.

Labels on them say the contents are toxic.

The informant said the mafia had muscled in on the lucrative business of nuclear waste disposal.

But he said that instead of getting rid of the material safely, he blew up the vessel out at sea, off the Calabrian coast.

He also says he was responsible for sinking two other ships containing toxic waste.

Experts are now examining samples taken from the wreck.

Other vessels

An official said that if the samples proved to be radioactive then a search for up to 30 other sunken vessels believed scuttled by the mafia would begin immediately.

For years there have been rumours that the mafia was sinking ships with nuclear and other waste on board, as part of a money-making racket.

The environmental campaign group Greenpeace and others have compiled lists over the past few decades of ships that have disappeared off the coast of Italy and Greece.

Processing waste is highly specialised and is supposed to be an industry where security is the top priority.

If tests show that there is nuclear material on the seabed it will prove that the mafia has moved into its dirtiest business yet.