

Hong Kong Customs detects third case this year involving over 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (April 21) seized about 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes in Yuen Long with an estimated market value of about \$28 million and a duty potential of about \$19 million. This is the third case detected by Customs this year involving more than 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes.

During an anti-illicit cigarette operation conducted in Yuen Long yesterday, Customs officers seized the batch of suspected illicit cigarettes from a truck and a 40-foot-long container inside a scrap metal yard. Two men, aged 40 and 34, were arrested.

Upon initial investigation, Customs believed that the illicit cigarette syndicate had adopted a circuitous route to transship the illicit cigarettes to Hong Kong in an attempt to evade law enforcement agencies.

Investigation is ongoing.

Customs detected this large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling case with more than 10 million in quantity again following detection of the smuggling case in February this year with the largest amount of illicit cigarettes in the past two decades, in which about 31 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized, and a seizure of about 10.2 million suspected illicit cigarettes made in March. This has demonstrated that the strategy of tackling at source has proved to be an effective way to cut the illicit cigarette supply chain. Customs will continue to adopt this strategy and spare no effort in combating illicit cigarette activities for protection of revenue.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (April 22), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health the admission of 28 patients (18 male and 10 female, aged six months to 84 years) in the past 24 hours who met the reporting criteria of COVID-19. Appropriate tests have been arranged for the patients.

There are 388 patients under isolation currently. So far, 678 patients who had COVID-19 confirmed or probable infections have been discharged upon recovery.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

LCQ2: Opening up facilities of the Fanling Golf Course

Following is a question by the Hon Tanya Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (April 22):

Question:

The Fanling Golf Course (FGC) is a sports and recreational facility developed by the Hong Kong Golf Club for use by its members on a piece of land leased from the Government under a private recreational lease (PRL). Under the relevant clause of PRL, FGC is currently required to open up its facilities for use by eligible outside bodies only for a maximum of three sessions of three hours each per week. In addition, the lessee of the land where FGC is located voluntarily opens up FGC's facilities for use by eligible outside bodies from Monday to Friday, as well as its night range for public use from 6pm to 10pm every day. However, some members of the public have pointed out that in recent months, the driving range has often been fully booked in no time, rendering them unable to book the relevant facilities on many occasions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the utilisation rate of FGC, as well as the number of days and number of hours for which the relevant facilities were available for booking and actually hired by non-members, in each month of the past two years, with a tabulated breakdown by the targets to which the facilities were opened up (i.e. eligible outside bodies and the public); if not, whether it will request the lessee concerned to provide such data;

(2) even though the Government has indicated that it will, when granting FGC a new PRL, add a clause requiring "the further opening up of facilities to outside bodies" (i.e. requiring the lessee to open up 30 per cent of its total sports and recreational facility capacity to eligible outside bodies, and co-organise at least 240 hours of sports activities every month with sports bodies for participation by members of the public), FGC still occupies as vast as 140 hectares of land upon excluding 32 hectares to be used for housing purpose, whether the Government will, in the new PRL, require the lessee to open up more than 30 per cent of the facilities to outside bodies and increase the number of opening hours; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has gained an understanding from the lessee concerned as to why members of the public have been unable to book FGC's driving range on many occasions in recent months, and requested the lessee to examine (i) whether there have been cases of persons being improperly given the right to make priority bookings or failing to take up their booked sessions on multiple occasions, and (ii) whether appropriate follow-up actions have been taken in respect of such cases?

Reply:

President,

In 2011, the Executive Council (ExCo) approved the modification on the policy of Private Recreational Leases (PRL) pertaining to the requirement of opening up sports facilities to eligible outside bodies, i.e. adjusting from a maximum of three sessions of three hours per week to a minimum of 50 hours per month. The modified requirement for opening up facilities is applicable to the renewal of leases which expired in 2011 and 2012.

The current lease of FGC, which was granted in 1999 and will expire in August 2020, is not subject to the modification approved by the ExCo in 2011. Nevertheless, the Hong Kong Golf Club (HKGC) has voluntarily followed ExCo's modification and opened up its sports facilities to eligible outside bodies (Note 1) for at least 50 hours per month. Details have been uploaded onto the website of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB):

www.hab.gov.hk/file_manager/en/documents/other_information/voluntary_open.pdf

. Moreover, HKGC has opened up its 18-hole course at FGC for use on weekdays by members of the public holding valid handicap certificates issued by recognised golf clubs or golfers' associations. Its driving range is also open for public use from 6pm to 10pm every day (weekdays and public holidays).

The reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The HAB requires PRL holders to submit quarterly reports for monitoring utilisation of facilities on PRL sites. The reports contain quarterly data without monthly breakdown. Information on utilisation of FGC's facilities is tabulated below:

Quarter		Actual number of hours utilised	
		Eligible outside bodies	Non-members
2018	Q1	3 647	55 193
	Q2	4 855	44 685
	Q3	2 298	33 462
	Q4	4 497	56 867
2019	Q1	4 738	61 750
	Q2	6 525	47 259
	Q3	4 438	48 842
	Q4	4 292	62 088

According to the information provided by the HKGC, around 120 000 golf rounds (Note 2) were played annually in the past two years at FGC, with eligible outside bodies and non-members accounting for about 40 per cent of the total utilisation.

(2) Sports and recreational facilities of private sports clubs vary in type, quantity and area occupied. The extent to which such facilities are opened up is therefore calculated based on their total sports and recreational facility capacity, instead of the size of the land. Specifically, according to the new PRL policy, private sports clubs are required to further open up their sports and recreational facilities, including opening up at least 30 per cent of the total sports capacity of such facilities to eligible outside bodies, and partner with sports organisations to organise sports programmes that are open for enrolment by members of the public with a minimum of 240 sports programme

hours per month.

When applying for renewal upon expiry of the current lease of FGC, a new plan on the opening up of facilities has to be submitted. The new plan will be approved only if it complies with the relevant requirement under the new policy.

(3) The driving range open for use at FGC has 27 bays, which are available for booking on a first-come-first-served basis by members of the public from 6pm to 10pm every day. In general, facilities at the driving range are able to meet the daily public demand. However, the demand for the driving range has increased at the initial stage of the COVID-19 epidemic due to closure of other golf courses and reduction in the number of golfers who played in the Mainland. Given the subsequent severe situation of the epidemic, all PRL sites (including FGC) have, as required by the Government, closed their sports and recreational facilities since March 24 this year until further notice.

Note 1: Eligible outside bodies include schools registered under the Education Ordinance, non-governmental organisations receiving recurrent subventions from the Social Welfare Department, uniformed groups, youth organisations, national sports associations and government departments. In accordance with the new PRL policy, the existing categories of eligible outside bodies have been expanded to include member organisations of the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China; sports organisations affiliated to national sports associations; district sports associations; the Hong Kong Schools Sports Federation; the New Territories Regional Sports Association; and sports organisations funded by government departments since 2019.

Note 2: There are a maximum of four players in the same flight. Each individual playing on a course will be counted as one golf round.

Composite Interest Rate: End of March 2020

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) announced today (April 22) the composite interest rate at the end of March 2020 (Note 1).

The composite interest rate, which is a measure of the average cost of funds of banks, decreased by 4 basis points to 0.95 per cent at the end of March 2020, from 0.99 per cent at the end of February 2020 (see Chart 1 in the Annex). The decrease in composite interest rate reflected decreases in

the weighted funding cost for deposits during the month (see Chart 2 in the Annex) (Note 2).

The historical data of the composite interest rate from the end of the fourth quarter of 2003 to the end of March 2020 are available in the Monthly Statistical Bulletin on the HKMA website (www.hkma.gov.hk).

Note 1: The composite interest rate is a weighted average interest rate of all Hong Kong dollar interest-rate-sensitive liabilities, which include deposits from customers, amounts due to banks, negotiable certificates of deposit and other debt instruments, and all other liabilities that do not involve any formal payment of interest but the values of which are sensitive to interest rate movements (such as Hong Kong dollar non-interest bearing demand deposits) on the books of banks. Data from retail banks, which account for about 90 per cent of the total customers' deposits in the banking sector, are used in the calculation. It should be noted that the composite interest rate represents only average interest expenses. There are various other costs involved in the making of a loan, such as operating costs (e.g. staff and rental expenses), credit cost and hedging cost, which are not covered by the composite interest rate.

Note 2: Since June 2019, the composite interest rate and weighted deposit rate have been calculated based on the new local "Interest rate risk in the banking book" (IRRBB) framework. As such, these figures are not strictly comparable with those of previous months.

FEHD releases Rodent Infestation Rate for 2019

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) announced today (April 22) that the overall Rodent Infestation Rate (RIR) for 2019 was 4.2 per cent, higher than the figure recorded in 2018 (3.4 per cent). Rodent infestation in public areas in the territory was generally under control.

An FEHD spokesman said, "Apart from 11.7 per cent recorded in Wan Chai District, the RIRs of all other districts were below 10 per cent for 2019.

"The relatively higher RIRs in some districts were mainly caused by poor hygiene conditions at specific spots and rear lanes, including the accumulation of disused articles, indiscriminate disposal of refuse and improper handling of food remnants, which provide food and shelter for rodents. In response to the survey results, the FEHD had already conducted specific rodent prevention and control actions in relevant locations and will continue to enhance rodent prevention and control measures in all districts, including strengthening street cleansing services, eliminating rodents in rear lanes by poisonous baiting, trapping and filling rat holes, encouraging

public participation in rodent prevention and control work, and carrying out public health education and publicity on rodent prevention and control."

There is no internationally adopted RIR. When devising the RIR, the FEHD made reference to overseas practices and the actual situation of Hong Kong. The overall RIR is the average infestation rate of the districts during the period. The district RIR assesses the distribution of the rodent problem in public places covered during the surveillance period. The district RIR is divided into three levels. Level 1 (less than 10 per cent) indicates that rodent infestation is not extensive in the area surveyed. Level 2 (between 10 per cent and 19 per cent) indicates that rodent infestation is slightly extensive in the area surveyed, and the FEHD will strengthen rodent disinfestation operations there. Level 3 (20 per cent or above) indicates that rodent infestation is extensive. The relevant government departments will form a joint task force and launch special rodent prevention and control operations to strengthen rodent disinfestation, environmental improvement and cleaning services comprehensively, and promote messages of rodent prevention and control in the community.

The spokesman said, "The district RIRs are not intended to reflect the actual situation of rodent infestation in the individual locations of the district. When conducting rodent prevention and control operations, the FEHD makes appropriate adjustments to the work in individual districts from time to time, taking into account reports from frontline staff and the views of the relevant District Councils and the local community, as well as the district RIR."

The FEHD continues to roll out the territory-wide anti-rodent campaign in two phases this year. The first phase was launched in early January and ended on March 13. The second phase, to last for 10 weeks, will be launched in July. During the campaign period, the FEHD steps up rodent control work and inspections in target areas including markets, municipal services buildings, hawker bazaars, typhoon shelters, lanes adjacent to food premises and other problematic spots and their peripheries to enhance the effectiveness of the overall rodent prevention and control work in the districts and to achieve sustainable results.

In addition, the FEHD will also conduct an eight-week anti-rodent operation in designated target areas in various districts after each phase of the territory-wide anti-rodent campaign this year, during which multi-pronged strategies, including improving environmental hygiene and stepping up rodent disinfestation and enforcement actions, will continue to be adopted to strengthen rodent prevention and control at the district level.

The FEHD has also strengthened co-operation with other government departments and has provided them with technical assistance in implementation of effective rodent prevention and control measures in areas under their purview, which includes conducting anti-rodent operations in designated target areas in more public housing estates by the Housing Department, with the support of the FEHD, to intensify the rodent prevention and control work. The FEHD will also continue to conduct studies and tests on various technologies, such as night vision cameras and thermal imaging cameras, with

the aim of enhancing the surveillance of rodent activity and the effectiveness of rodent prevention and control.

The spokesman stressed that effective rodent prevention and control hinges on sustained co-operation between the community and the Government. Apart from enhancing the rodent prevention and control work in all districts, the FEHD will also step up public education and publicity targeting different sectors of the community, including co-organising promotional activities with District Councils, to encourage the public to actively participate in the anti-rodent campaigns and prevent rodent infestation by eliminating the three survival conditions of rodents, namely food, harbourage and passages, meaning the elimination of the food sources and hiding places of rodents, as well as blockage of their dispersal routes.

For more information on rodent prevention and control measures and the RIR, please visit the FEHD website at www.fehd.gov.hk.