

Hong Kong Customs conducts interdepartmental anti-illicit cigarette enforcement operation and publicity activities to combat illicit cigarette-related crimes (with photos)

From September 19 to October 6, Hong Kong Customs and the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health launched a joint enforcement operation codenamed "Thunder" in various districts across Hong Kong to combat telephone ordering of illicit cigarettes and related leaflets distribution activities in public rental housing (PRH) estates. Afterwards, Customs yesterday and today (October 6 and 7) conducted anti-illicit cigarette publicity activities with a member of the Legislative Council, District Councilors and multiple government departments, bringing anti-illicit cigarette messages to the community through different channels.

During operation "Thunder", Customs officers detected a total of 39 illicit cigarette cases and seized a total of about 40 000 suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$180,000 and a duty potential of about \$130,000. Thirty-four men and five women, aged between 19 and 81, were arrested. Most of the arrested persons purchased the illicit cigarettes for personal consumption, and all cases have been duly followed up. At the same time, Customs handed over three suspected illicit cigarette leaflets distribution cases to TACO for follow-up investigations.

Moreover, Customs on October 7 and 8 collaborated with Legislative Council member Mr Frankie Ngan, several Kowloon East District Councilors, TACO, the Police and a Community Care Team to publicise anti-illicit cigarette messages in a number of PRH estates. During the event, Customs officers patrolled the housing estates, set up a promotional booth, distributed promotion leaflets to residents and encouraged them to report suspected illicit cigarette trading activities to Customs.

Customs reminds young people, especially students, not to be involved in illicit cigarette activities or distribution of illicit cigarette flyers to avoid creating a criminal record that may affect their future.

Customs will continue to step up enforcement to vigorously combat illicit cigarette activities through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and interception at source. If PRH units are found to be involved in illicit cigarette activities, Customs will notify the Housing Department for follow-up action after the conclusion of court proceedings.

Customs stresses that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes. 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 182 80 80 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

