

Hong Kong Customs detects illicit cigarette cases at different levels and seizes tobacco products worth about \$47 million (with photos)

In the past two weeks, Hong Kong Customs detected three illicit cigarette cases at different levels, including two large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling cases and one case that involved two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres. A total of about 12.6 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 54 kilograms of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco products, with an estimated market value of about \$47 million and a duty potential of about \$32 million, were seized.

The first case is connected with the level of cross-boundary smuggling. Through risk assessment, Customs on September 20 inspected a 40-foot seaborne container, declared as carrying packaging boxes and arriving in Hong Kong from Guangzhou, at the Tuen Mun River Trade Terminal Customs Cargo Examination Compound. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized about 3.4 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside the container.

After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers yesterday (October 3) targeted two 40-foot seaborne containers, declared as carrying household items, also arriving in Hong Kong from Guangzhou, for inspection. A total of about 4.9 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized inside the two containers, leading to successful detection of the second case.

At the storage and distribution level, Customs successfully smashed a suspected illicit cigarette storage centre at a mental hut in Lau Shui Heung, Fanling, last night and seized about 2.6 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 54kg of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco products. A 21-year-old non-local man who claimed to be a driver and was suspected to be connected with the case was arrested. After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers this afternoon (October 4) further seized 1.7 million suspected illicit cigarettes at a metal hut on Kung Um Road, Yuen Long, successfully smashing another suspected illicit cigarette storage centre.

Investigations of the three cases are ongoing.

Customs will continue to combat illicit cigarette activities on all fronts, including cross-boundary smuggling, storage and distribution as well as peddling, through a multipronged enforcement approach.

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) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

