

Hong Kong Customs detects sea smuggling case involving cigarettes and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$115 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs on August 5 detected a suspected illicit cigarette smuggling case involving a barge and a tugboat in the waters off Stonecutters Island and Tsing Yi. About 42 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$115 million and a duty potential of about \$80 million were seized.

Through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and data analysis, Customs officers intercepted a suspicious barge and tugboat in the waters off Stonecutters Island and Tsing Yi in the morning on that day. Three 40-foot containers and two 20-foot containers with suspected illicit cigarettes concealed inside were found on board the barge.

During the operation, Customs officers arrested six men, aged between 36 and 69, suspected to be connected with the case.

An investigation is ongoing. Customs will continue to trace the source and the flow of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Including the suspected illicit cigarettes seized in this operation, Customs has seized about 376 million suspected illicit cigarettes this year as at August 10, an increase of about 53 per cent compared to around 245 million seized during the same period last year.

Customs will continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis for interception at source as well as through its multi-pronged enforcement strategy targeting storage, distribution and peddling to spare no effort in combating illicit cigarette activities.

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.

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 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

