

Hong Kong Customs makes illicit cigarette seizure worth about \$12 million in large-scale anti-illicit cigarette operation (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a territory-wide anti-illicit cigarette operation codenamed "Eagle" from May 1 to yesterday (May 28) to combat illicit cigarette activities on all fronts, including cross-boundary smuggling, storage and distribution as well as peddling, through a multi-pronged enforcement approach. During the operation, Customs detected a total of 94 cases and seized about 3.5 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 1 million suspected illicit heat-not-burn (HNB) products with an estimated market value of about \$12 million and a duty potential of about \$8.5 million. Sixty-one men and 13 women aged between 15 and 81 were arrested, among which 22 were illicit cigarette sellers and 25 were buyers.

Of the 94 cases, 36 involved smuggling and among these Customs officers made seizures of about 3.2 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 900 000 suspected illicit HNB products. Thirty-three out of the 36 cases involved smuggling through parcel channels while one case involved smuggling in a seaborne container with the highest seizure of suspected illicit cigarettes. In that case, Customs officers seized about 2.2 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside an inbound container at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound on May 18.

In 11 cases of storage and distribution of illicit cigarettes, Customs officers seized about 270 000 suspected illicit cigarettes and about 80 000 suspected illicit HNB products in Causeway Bay, Chai Wan, Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong, Tseung Kwan O, Sha Tin, Tsuen Wan and Tuen Mun.

As for the remaining 47 cases, all of them were on the peddling front. Customs officers seized about 25 000 suspected illicit cigarettes and about 400 suspected illicit HNB products in total.

All the cases have been duly followed up.

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 (DCO), tobacco is among the dutiable goods to which the DCO applies. Any HNB product containing tobacco in content is also a dutiable item subject to the control of the DCO. Any person who possesses, sells or buys dutiable commodities without a valid license commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Hong Kong Customs reminds members of the public that selling and buying of illicit cigarettes are illegal. Customs officers will continue to take stringent enforcement action against illicit cigarette activities of all kinds.

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).

