

Hong Kong Customs raids suspected “cheap whites” mobile storage centres in Yuen Long (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (March 5) raided suspected illicit cigarette mobile storage centres in Yuen Long and seized about 1.03 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$4.6 million and a duty potential of about \$3.4 million. Among them, about 1.02 million of the seized illicit cigarettes were "cheap whites", accounting for about 99 per cent of the total seizure.

During an anti-illicit cigarette operation conducted in Yuen Long yesterday afternoon, Customs intercepted a suspicious man who was moving goods at the rear of a light goods vehicle in Long Ping Estate. Customs officers immediately intercepted the man and seized about 180 000 suspected illicit cigarettes in the vehicle. The man was arrested immediately. Later, Customs officers escorted that 49-year-old man, who claimed to be unemployed, to a truck parked near Lam Hau Tsuen for a follow-up investigation. After a search, about 850 000 suspected illicit cigarettes were seized from the truck. During the operation, Customs detained the two vehicles suspected to be used for storing and distributing illicit cigarettes.

An initial investigation revealed that the trucks involved in the case were used as illicit cigarette mobile storage centres to supply illicit cigarettes to residents in Yuen Long. Customs will continue to trace the source of the illicit cigarettes, and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

The arrested man has been released on bail pending further investigation.

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

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 8080 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

