

Hong Kong Customs raids suspected illicit cigarette storage centre (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs today (March 26) conducted an anti-illicit cigarette operation in Kwun Tong and raided a suspected illicit cigarette storage centre in which about 1 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$4.7 million and a duty potential of about \$3.5 million, were seized.

Customs this early morning intercepted a suspicious man who was moving goods in Hing Yip Street, Kwun Tong, and seized about 20 000 suspected illicit cigarettes from his trolley. The 28-year-old man, who claimed to be unemployed, was subsequently arrested and escorted to a unit in an industrial building nearby for a further search. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized about 1 million suspected illicit cigarettes from the unit, thereby shutting down the suspected illicit cigarette storage centre.

Customs believes the operation has dismantled a storage and distribution centre which was used to supply illicit cigarettes to the East Kowloon district.

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

The arrested man was charged with "dealing with goods to which the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance applies" and will appear at the Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts on April 26.

Customs will also 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 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

