Hong Kong Customs combats illicit cigarette activities (with photos)

â€‹Hong Kong Customs yesterday (August 12) mounted an operation against illicit cigarette activities in Kwai Chung and Fanling and seized about 200 000 suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about $600,000 and a duty potential of about $400,000.

Customs officers detected two cases of suspected illicit cigarettes storage and distribution and seized the batch of suspected illicit cigarettes at an industrial building unit in Kwai Chung and a public housing flat in Fanling. Two men, aged 40 and 64, were arrested.

Investigation is ongoing.

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).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Tuesday, August 13, 2019 is 106.8 (up 0.1 against yesterday's index).

Test results of seasonal food surveillance project on mooncakes (first phase) all satisfactory

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (August 13) announced the results of a seasonal food surveillance project on mooncakes (first phase). The results of about 140 samples tested were all satisfactory.

A spokesman for the CFS said that samples of over 20 brands covering traditional, snowy, ice-cream and other types of mooncakes had been collected from various retailers (including online retailers) and food factories for chemical and microbiological tests and nutrition content analysis.

The chemical tests covered colouring matters such as Sudan dyes, preservatives such as sulphur dioxide and sorbic acid, aflatoxins and metallic contaminants. Microbiological tests covered pathogens such as Bacillus cereus, Clostridium perfringens, Salmonella and coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms. For nutrition content analysis, the contents of sodium and total fat of the samples were tested to see if they were consistent with the declared values on the nutrition labels.

The spokesman reminded people to maintain a balanced diet and avoid excessive eating of mooncakes as they are generally high in sugar and fat. Some types also contain relatively high levels of salt. Eating too much fat will increase the risk of being overweight and obese while dietary sugar intake is a determinant of body weight and dental caries. In addition, excessive sodium intake will increase the risk of developing hypertension, fatal stroke and coronary heart disease.

He advised people to refer to nutrition labels, particularly on the sugar, salt and fat contents, to make a healthier choice. People should avoid mooncake types with high levels of fat or sugar, i.e. containing more than 20 grams of total fat or more than 15g of sugar per 100g of food. As for reducing salt intake, people can choose low-sodium mooncake types, i.e. containing less than 120 milligrams of sodium per 100g of food.

He said that people should consider their health conditions and consume mooncakes in an appropriate amount during the Mid-Autumn Festival. He advised people to share mooncakes with their family members and friends, as this not only enhances the festive atmosphere, but also allows them to taste mooncakes of different flavours and avoid overconsumption.

Members of the public should heed the following points in the purchase, storage and consumption of mooncakes to prevent food-borne diseases:

* Buy mooncakes from reliable outlets rather than patronising unlicensed

hawkers. Check whether the mooncakes are properly packaged, pay attention to the expiry dates before purchase and eat them before the expiry dates;

* Store mooncakes according to the instructions on the package if they are not to be consumed immediately. Keep snowy mooncakes at 4 degrees Celsius or below and ice-cream mooncakes at minus 18 degrees C or below, and consume them as soon as possible after taking them out from the refrigerator;

* Use an icebox to carry snowy or ice-cream mooncakes outdoors and consume them as soon as possible;

* Wrap mooncakes properly and separate them from raw food when storing in a refrigerator to prevent cross-contamination; and

* Maintain good personal hygiene. Wash hands properly with liquid soap and running water before handling and consuming mooncakes.

The spokesman also reminded food traders to adhere to the Good Manufacturing Practice. Other than purchasing food ingredients from reliable suppliers, they should also comply with legal requirements when using food additives.

"Snowy and ice-cream mooncakes, which do not undergo a baking process at high temperature, need to be handled hygienically during processing, transportation and storage to avoid contamination and growth of germs," he said.

The CFS will continue to conduct surveillance on mooncakes and the second phase results will be released in a timely manner to ensure food safety.

[Nineteen immigration offenders arrested (with photos)]

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted an anti-illegal worker operation codenamed "Twilight" yesterday (August 12). A total of 13 illegal workers and six suspected employers were arrested.

During the operation, ImmD Task Force officers raided 10 restaurants on Hong Kong Island. The illegal workers comprised six men and seven women, aged 31 to 54. Among them, one man was a holder of a recognisance form, which prohibits him from taking any employment. In addition, five men and three women were suspected of using and being in possession of forged Hong Kong identity cards. Meanwhile, five men and one woman, aged 30 to 56, were suspected of employing the illegal workers.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of $50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of $50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases. It is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Offenders are liable to prosecution and a maximum penalty of a $100,000 fine and up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of $350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of $150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threat and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

 

[InvestHK encourages Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region enterprises to "go global" via Hong Kong amid Belt and Road Initiative (with photo)]

Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) held an investment promotion seminar in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, today (August 13) to update local enterprises on Hong Kong's business environment, tax and financing advantages, and encourage them to expand their business globally via the city.

The seminar, entitled "Belt and Road, Together We Grow", was jointly organised by InvestHK and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Committee . Associate Director-General of Investment Promotion Mr Vincent Tang and the Vice Chairman of the People's Government of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Ms Ai Lihua, delivered welcome remarks at the event.

Mr Tang told the seminar about how Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region enterprises leverage Hong Kong's business advantages to "go global". He said, "The economic development of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has grown rapidly. Many local enterprises have already set up their business in Hong Kong, using the city as their international platform to 'go global'. Hong Kong plays an important role in the Belt and Road Initiative. Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region enterprises can leverage the city's international financial platform and professional services to expand overseas and structure finance projects. Hong Kong has well-developed and mature financial infrastructure, free flow of capital and diverse finance channels. The city is the world's largest offshore Renminbi centre as well as the leading asset management hub in Asia. Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region enterprises can make use of the diversified professional services to access the very best accounting and tax, legal, product design, engineering management and project planning services and much more, expanding their business along the Belt and Road development."

He also told the audience that the Hong Kong Government has introduced various policies and measures to boost innovation and technology development. It has also introduced tax incentives to promote local research and development (R&D), encouraging private enterprises to undertake more R&D activities.

The Senior Manager of the Northern China Unit of InvestHK, Mr William Ren, further elaborated on Hong Kong's advantages and how Mainland enterprises can capitalise on the city's business services to "go global". The Partner, Tax and China Business Advisory Service of PwC Ltd, Ms Cathy Jiang, and the Assistant Vice President of Global Issuer Services, Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited, Ms Wang Xiaofang, talked about how to make use of Hong Kong's taxation advantages to capture opportunities amid Belt and Road initiatives, as well as the reasons to list in the city and the latest developments of the Hong Kong securities market. The Immigration Officer of the Office of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) in Beijing, Mr Jim Chin, explained to the audience the work visa arrangements for Mainland enterprises. The Hong Kong Business Manager, Overseas Sales Region, Sales System of Inner Mongolia Mongniu Dairy (Group) Co Ltd, Mr Bai Huaifu, also spoke on his company's experience on how to tap the opportunities arising from the Belt and Road Initiative for internationalisation via Hong Kong.

About InvestHK

InvestHK is the department of the HKSAR Government responsible for attracting foreign direct investment and supporting overseas and Mainland businesses to set up or expand in Hong Kong. It provides free advice and customised services for overseas and Mainland companies. For more information, please visit www.investhk.gov.hk.

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