

DH conducts enforcement operation against illegal displaying smoking product advertisements (with photos)

The Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health (DH) conducted an enforcement operation against illegal displaying smoking product advertisements in Sham Shu Po district today (July 23).

During the operation, officers from TACO seized three smoking product display boxes from two stores, which were suspected of contravening the provisions of the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) (the Ordinance) related to the prohibition of smoking product advertisement. TACO's investigation is ongoing.

In accordance with the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371), no person shall display or cause to be displayed any smoking product advertisement. Any person who contravenes the prohibitions is liable on summary conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000, and in the case of a continuing offence, to a further penalty of \$1,500 for each day during which the offence continues.

A spokesman for the DH stressed that the department has always been closely monitoring and taking stringent enforcement actions against violations of the Ordinance (including displaying or distributing smoking product advertisements) and follow up every relevant complaint seriously. From January 2023 to June 2024, TACO removed over 1 900 webpages, social media accounts or posts with smoking product advertisements. TACO also issued 123 summonses and 42 warning letters regarding offences of displaying or distributing smoking product advertisements during the same period.

To step up enforcement actions to combat the distribution of smoking product leaflets in public housing estates, TACO has carried out about 200 joint operations with the Police, the Housing Department (HD), and the Customs and Excise Department in various public housing estates throughout the territories since January this year. Furthermore, TACO, the Police and the HD have established a co-operation mechanism. When any smoking product leaflet distribution is detected at public housing estates, the housing estate staff will immediately contact the Police for assistance and subsequently refer the case to TACO for further investigation. Since 2021, TACO has successfully prosecuted 14 offenders (involved in 15 cases) for distributing smoking product leaflets. The highest penalty for these convicted cases was a fine of \$8,000.

TACO will continue to carry out relevant operations, and follow up and investigate every complaint regarding smoking product advertisements, as well as refer any suspected cases of illicit cigarettes that involve violations of the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109) to the relevant department for further investigation.

In addition, the Government earlier announced the roll-out of 10 tobacco control measures in the short-term, including the introduction of plain packaging, and the prohibition of flavoured tobacco (menthol, and candy/fruit-flavoured tobacco). Scientific evidence shows that the packaging and added flavours of smoking products reduce awareness of the hazard of tobacco and in turn increase the chances of non-smokers (especially teenagers) to start smoking. These tobacco control measures will effectively mitigate the promotional effect of smoking products.

The spokesman reiterated that all smoking products, regardless of whether they are duty paid or not, pose significant health risks. Smokers should quit smoking as early as possible for their own health and that of others. Information on smoking cessation can also be obtained from www.livetobaccofree.hk.

