

DH conducts interdepartmental operation against distribution of smoking product advertisements in public housing estates (with photos)

The Department of Health (DH) today (February 8) said that, with the Lunar New Year approaching, its Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) has conducted a joint operation with the Police and the Housing Department (HD) in January and February this year, during which inspection and publicity activities were carried out in 11 public housing estates located in different districts across Hong Kong, with a view to combating the distribution of smoking product leaflets in public housing estates.

During the operation, in addition to patrolling the estate, officers from the TACO reminded estate security personnel and residents to observe the relevant laws and not to purchase illicit cigarettes. They were also provided with information on what to do when a suspected violation is found.

In accordance with the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) (the Ordinance), no person shall distribute any smoking product advertisement (including any promotion leaflets). Any person who contravenes the regulation is liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000. In 2023, the TACO received about 21 130 complaints related to the Ordinance, including about 1 070 complaints (accounting for approximately 5 per cent of the total) involving the distribution of smoking product advertisements. The TACO will follow up and investigate every complaint regarding the distribution of smoking product advertisements, and will also 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, a co-operation mechanism has been established among the TACO, the Police and the HD, targeting the distribution of smoking product leaflets in public housing estates. When any smoking product leaflet distribution is detected at public housing estates, the housing estate staff will contact the Police for assistance and subsequently refer the case to the TACO for further investigation. Since 2021, the TACO has successfully prosecuted 12 offenders (involved in 13 cases) for distributing smoking product leaflets. The highest penalty for these convicted cases was a fine of \$8,000.

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 the distribution of smoking product advertisements). The spokesman reiterated that all tobacco 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.

