

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

â€‹ To step up enforcement actions to combat the distribution of smoking product leaflets in public housing estates, the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health (DH) today (March 5) continued to carry out a joint operation with the Police and the Housing Department (HD) to conduct inspections and carry out publicity at two public housing estates in Kwun Tong District. In addition to patrolling the estates, officers from TACO provided estate security personnel and residents with information on what to do when a suspected violation is found. One member of the Kwun Tong District Council and three members of the Area Committee (Kwun Tong) also joined today's operation and reminded residents not to defy the law.

Since January this year, TACO has carried out joint operations with the Police and the HD in a total of 52 public housing estates in various districts across Hong Kong. Another 10 joint operations were also conducted with the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department in February to combat the sale of illicit cigarettes and related promotional activities at public housing estates. Additionally, TACO, the Police and the HD have established a co-operation mechanism targeting the distribution of smoking product leaflets at 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 TACO for further investigation. Since 2021, 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.

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. From January 2023 to January 2024, TACO received about 23 190 complaints related to the Ordinance, including about 1 290 complaints (accounting for approximately 6 per cent of the total) involving the distribution of smoking product advertisements. TACO will continue to carry out relevant interdepartmental operations, and follow up and investigate every complaint regarding the distribution of 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.

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.

