

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

â€œâ€œTo 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 (November 4) continued to carry out a joint operation with the Police and the Housing Department (HD) to conduct inspections and carry out publicity at four public housing estates in Kwun Tong District. In addition to patrolling at 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 also joined today's operation and reminded the residents not to defy the law.

Since January this year, TACO has carried out more than 220 joint operations with the Police, the HD, and the Customs and Excise Department in various public housing estates throughout the territories 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.

A spokesman for the DH stressed that TACO has been closely monitoring the market situation and taking stringent enforcement actions against violations of the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) (the Ordinance), and will appropriately adjust its enforcement strategies according to the actual circumstances from time to time. Apart from following up and investigating each complaint, proactive plainclothes enforcement and interdepartmental joint operations have also been strengthened since 2023. From January 2023 to August 2024, TACO removed over 2 550 webpages, social media accounts or posts with smoking-product advertisements, and issued 124 summonses and 43 warning letters regarding offences of displaying or distributing smoking-product advertisements during the same period.

In accordance with 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. 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 reiterated 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). 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.

