

DH's operation "Thunderstone" combats illegal sale of alternative smoking products (with photo)

The Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health (DH) conducted an operation codenamed "Thunderstone" yesterday (December 3) against the illegal sale of alternative smoking products (ASPs). A batch of 1 200 suspected ASFs and a batch of 1 200 suspected dutiable cigarettes were seized during the operation.

Through in-depth investigations, officers of TACO yesterday conducted an operation by posing as customers to contact people suspected of selling ASFs illegally. In the operation, a batch of 1 200 suspected ASFs and a batch of 1 200 suspected dutiable cigarettes were seized. Officers initiated an investigation against two 35-year-old males for suspecting of selling ASFs and possessing ASFs for commercial purposes. Charges will be laid against offender(s) when sufficient evidence is found regarding the sale of ASFs. The DH will also refer the suspected violation of the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109) to the relevant enforcement department for investigation.

The Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) prohibits the promotion, manufacture, sale and possession for commercial purposes of ASFs. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

A spokesman for the DH said that the department will continue to take stringent enforcement action. The spokesman also cautioned against the use of any ASFs and stressed that these products contain amounts of nicotine similar to those of conventional cigarettes in order to sustain addiction. In addition, health hazards of long-term exposure to these new products are unknown. The Government appeals to smokers to quit smoking as early as possible for their own health and that of others. They are encouraged to call the DH's Integrated Smoking Cessation Hotline on 1833 183. The hotline is operated by registered nurses and provides professional counselling services on smoking cessation. Information on smoking cessation can also be obtained from www.livetobaccofree.hk.

