

Hong Kong Customs and EPD join forces to combat illegal hazardous waste import and export activities (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) mounted a joint operation on June 13 and seized about 50 tonnes of suspected illegal export waste lead-acid batteries with an estimated market value of about \$500,000 at the Kwai Chung Container Terminals.

Officers from Customs and the EPD inspected two outbound containers destined for Malaysia at the Kwai Chung Container Terminals on June 13 and found the batch of waste lead-acid batteries inside the containers.

Preliminary investigation by the EPD confirmed that the waste was not covered by a valid export permit. The EPD will instigate prosecution against the persons concerned subject to evidence.

Customs and the EPD have been working closely on risk assessment and intelligence exchange to select suspicious containers for inspection. From July 2018, joint operations by the two departments have resulted in the detection of 73 cases of illegal import and export of hazardous waste. Various kinds of hazardous waste, including waste flat panel displays, waste printed circuit boards, waste toner cartridges and waste batteries, have been seized with a total estimated market value of about \$9.5 million. The EPD has successfully prosecuted 18 of the cases. For the remaining cases, investigations are ongoing or pending court trial.

The EPD has immediately returned the illegally imported waste to the places of origin and notified the local law enforcement authorities for follow-up investigations.

Customs will continue to step up co-operation with the EPD with a view to curbing illegal hazardous waste import and export activities.

According to the Waste Disposal Ordinance, it is an offence for anyone to import or export hazardous waste without obtaining a valid permit beforehand. First-time offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and six months' imprisonment. For subsequent offences, offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and two years' imprisonment.

