

Hong Kong Customs combats illicit cigarette activities on all fronts and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth over \$22 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs in the past two weeks has taken a territory-wide multi-pronged enforcement approach to combat illicit cigarette activities on all fronts, including cross-boundary smuggling, storage and distribution as well as peddling of illicit cigarettes. About 8.25 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$22.6 million and a duty potential of about \$15.7 million were seized.

Customs mounted a special operation codenamed "Thunder" in mid-September to combat illicit cigarette telephone ordering activities in public rental housing (PRH). So far, 26 relevant cases were detected at PRH in different districts, including Aberdeen, Chai Wan, Wong Tai Sin, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon City, Ngau Tau Kok, Tai Po, Sheung Shui and Hung Shui Kiu. About 550 000 suspected illicit cigarettes were seized. In those cases, Customs officers raided two suspected illicit cigarette storages in PRH units and detained two vehicles suspected to be used for illicit cigarette distribution.

On the other hand, Customs officers yesterday (September 24) seized about 7.7 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside a metal hut in Yuen Long. It is believed that a suspected illicit cigarette storage was raided.

Twenty-two men and five women, aged between 16 and 77, were arrested in the abovementioned cases.

Customs will continue to enhance enforcement against illicit cigarette activities on all fronts through intelligence analysis. If PRH units are found to be involved in illicit cigarette activities, Customs will notify the Housing Department for follow-up action after the conclusion of court proceedings.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

