

Hong Kong Customs conducts large-scale operation to combat illicit heat-not-burn products, nicotine-containing electronic cigarettes and electronic cigarette oil (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs has mounted a special operation in the past month to combat illicit heat-not-burn (HNB) products as well as nicotine-containing electronic cigarettes and electronic cigarette oil. A total of 51 cases were detected across the territory and about 2.63 million suspected illicit HNB products, about 190 000 suspected nicotine-containing electronic cigarettes and about 5 000 millilitres of suspected nicotine-containing electronic cigarette oil were seized with an estimated market value of about \$15 million and a duty potential of about \$5 million.

During the operation, Customs officers detected 42 cases on the smuggling front, including parcel, air cargo and land cargo channels, at Hong Kong International Airport, Shenzhen Bay Control Point and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Control Point. Seizures of about 1.95 million suspected illicit HNB products, about 190 000 suspected nicotine-containing electronic cigarettes and about 5 000ml of suspected nicotine-containing electronic cigarette oil were made.

The other nine cases are storage, distribution and peddling cases. Customs officers seized about 680 000 suspected illicit HNB products in Tuen Mun, Sheung Shui, Kwun Tong, Lam Tin, To Kwa Wan, Cheung Sha Wan and Causeway Bay. Two suspected illicit HNB product storage units were raided and three vehicles suspected to be used for illicit HNB product distribution were detained.

During the operation, nine men and two women, aged between 28 and 52, were arrested. Investigations of all the cases are ongoing and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

According to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance, nicotine-containing electronic cigarette products are classified as pharmaceutical products requiring registration with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong before they can be sold in Hong Kong. In addition, nicotine is a Part 1 poison which can only be sold at pharmacies under the supervision of a registered pharmacist. Illegal sale and possession of Part 1 poisons and unregistered pharmaceutical products are criminal offences. The maximum penalty for each offence is a fine of \$100,000 and two years' imprisonment.

Customs reminds members of the public and retailers that the Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 will come into effect tomorrow (April 30). According to the new legislation, any person who imports, promotes, manufactures, sells or possesses for commercial purposes alternative smoking products, including electronic smoking products, heated tobacco products, herbal cigarettes and any related devices, parts and accessories, commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Customs will continue to take stringent enforcement action against all kinds of illicit cigarette activities.

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). They may call the Department of Health at 2961 8823 for further enquiries and complaints relating to alternative smoking products.

