

Hong Kong Customs conducts special operation against illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities in public rental housing in Kowloon East (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs has mounted a special enforcement operation in the past three weeks to combat illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities in public rental housing (PRH) estates in Kowloon East District. A total of about 150 000 suspected illicit cigarettes and about seven grams of suspected cannabis buds were seized. The estimated market value of the suspected illicit cigarettes was about \$420,000 with a duty potential of about \$290,000.

During the operation, Customs officers detected 25 relevant cases in different districts and sub-districts of Kowloon East District, including Wong Tai Sin, Tsz Wan Shan, Kai Tak, Sau Mau Ping, Ngau Tau Kok, Kwun Tong, Lam Tin and Yau Tong, resulting in the above-mentioned seizures of suspected illicit cigarettes. In those cases, Customs officers raided a suspected illicit cigarette storage centre in a PRH unit in Lam Tin and detained two vehicles suspected to be used for illicit cigarette distribution.

In the above-mentioned cases, 28 persons, including 24 men and four women who were aged between 14 and 71, were arrested. They include both illicit cigarette sellers and buyers. All the cases have been duly followed up.

Customs has all along been enhancing enforcement against illicit cigarette activities on all fronts, including cross-boundary smuggling, storage and distribution as well as peddling, 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.

Customs reminds young people, especially students, to never become involved in illicit cigarette activities or distribute illicit cigarette flyers, to avoid creating a criminal record and affect their future.

Customs stresses that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes. 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).

