

[Hong Kong Customs detects four illicit cigarette smuggling cases and shuts down illicit cigarette packaging and storage centre with seizure worth about \\$69 million \(with photos\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs earlier detected four cases of cigarette smuggling in Kwai Chung and, upon follow-up investigation, raided an illicit cigarette packaging and storage centre in Sheung Shui on December 3. A total of about 12.3 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 2 000 kilograms of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco with a total estimated market value of about \$69 million and a duty potential of about \$49 million were seized.

Customs in the past few months detected four cases of exporting smuggled cigarettes at the same logistics centre in Kwai Chung. A total of about 4.8 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 2 000kg of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco were seized in several batches of goods destined for Australia.

After a follow-up investigation, Customs on December 3 took action and raided a metal warehouse in Sheung Shui, seizing 7.5 million suspected illicit cigarettes and a large batch of packaging tools and dismantling an illicit cigarette packaging and storage centre. During the operation, Customs officers arrested three men, aged between 41 and 75, who were suspected to be connected with the case. They comprised a driver and two packers.

Initial investigations revealed that the syndicate used remote places to store illicit cigarettes. After repackaging and mixed with some lamps and clothes as disguise, the illicit cigarettes were transported to the logistics centre concerned in Kwai Chung and planned to be shipped to Australia for profit.

Investigations of the cases are ongoing, and the three arrested men were released on bail pending further investigation.

Customs will continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis, and step up enforcement actions to combat cross-boundary illicit cigarettes activities. 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.

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 182 8080 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/).

