

# Hong Kong Customs detects illicit cigarette smuggling cases involving air passengers and raids illicit cigarette storage centre (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs over the past two weeks enhanced enforcement actions at Hong Kong International Airport and detected illicit cigarette smuggling cases involving air passengers. Also, Customs raided a suspected illicit cigarette storage centre in Yuen Long yesterday (March 6), seizing a total of about 6.7 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 570 000 suspected alternative smoking products, with a total estimated total market value of about \$33 million. The duty potential of the illicit cigarettes was about \$22 million.

In the small hours today (March 7), Customs officers intercepted a male outside a hotel in Tin Shui Wai and seized a total of about 90 000 sticks of suspected illicit cigarettes and about 110 000 suspected alternative smoking products in his nylon bag and the hotel room he was staying in. The man was subsequently arrested. After investigations, Customs believes that illicit cigarette syndicate made use of air passengers to smuggle illicit cigarettes and alternative smoking products, which were then stored in hotel rooms for further distribution.

The arrested man, aged 36 and claiming to be unemployed, was charged. He will appear at the Tuen Mun Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (March 8). The suspected alternative smoking products seized will be handed over to the Department of Health for follow-up action.

At the same time, Customs detected 20 illicit cigarette smuggling cases with 13 men and eight women arrested at the airport over the past two weeks. A total of about 600 000 suspected illicit cigarettes and about 460 000 suspected alternative smoking products, with an estimated total market value of about \$4 million and a duty potential of about \$2 million, were seized.

It is believed that the syndicate that smuggle illicit cigarettes and alternative smoking products through passengers was smashed.

Moreover, after an in-depth investigation, Customs carried out a strike-and-search operation at a logistics warehouse in Yuen Long yesterday. Customs officers intercepted a man who was moving goods to a vehicle and seized about 6 million suspected illicit cigarettes in the vehicle and the warehouse. The 44-year-old man, who claimed to be a driver, was arrested. He has been released on bail pending further investigation.

Customs will continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis for interception at source as well as through its multipronged enforcement

strategy targeting storage, distribution and peddling to spare no effort in combating illicit cigarette activities.

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

