

Hong Kong Customs detects large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling case and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$80 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs on May 22 detected a large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling case and seized about 21 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$80 million and a duty potential of about \$53 million, in Tuen Mun.

Customs officers on that day intercepted a suspicious barge and two container trucks at the Tuen Mun Public Cargo Working Area in the morning and seized the batch of illicit cigarettes inside two 40-foot containers on board the trucks after inspection. Four men, aged between 22 and 55, suspected to be connected with the case were arrested. Two of them were trucks drivers and two of them were barge crew members.

An investigation is ongoing. Customs will continue to trace the source and the flow of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Including the suspected illicit cigarettes seized in this operation, Customs had seized about 394 million suspected illicit cigarettes this year as at yesterday (May 30), which has exceeded 50 per cent of last year's total seizure amount. Customs will continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis for interception at source as well as through its multi-pronged enforcement strategy targeting storage, distribution and peddling to spare no effort in combating illicit cigarette 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.

Customs reminds members of the public 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).

