

Hong Kong Customs detects large-scale sea smuggling case and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$140 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (July 24) detected a large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling case in the waters off Lamma Island and seized about 30 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$140 million and a duty potential of about \$100 million, on board a cargo vessel. About 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes seized were duty-not-paid cigarettes known as "cheap whites", accounting for about 30 per cent of the total seizure.

Customs in the early morning of yesterday intercepted a suspicious cargo vessel in the waters off Lamma Island. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized the batch of illicit cigarettes inside three 40-foot containers on board the vessel. Seven non-local men, including a captain and six crew members, aged between 24 and 55, suspected to be connected with the case were arrested.

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.

The arrested captain, aged 48, will be charged with one count of importing unmanifested cargoes. He will appear at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (July 26).

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.

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.

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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) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/).

