

Hong Kong Customs detects large-scale sea smuggling case and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$240 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs stepped up enforcement to combat illicit cigarette smuggling activities by sea over the past week and detected two related cases involving seaborne containers. A total of about 53 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$240 million and a duty potential of about \$170 million were seized. About 20 million suspected illicit cigarettes seized were duty-not-paid cigarettes known as "cheap whites", accounting for about 40 per cent of the total seizure.

In the first case, through risk assessment and intelligence analysis, Customs selected for inspection a 40-foot container, declared as carrying recycled aluminum and arriving from Taiwan en route to Foshan, Guangdong, via Hong Kong, on the morning of October 18 at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized about 11 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside the container. An investigation is ongoing.

In the second case, Customs yesterday (October 19) morning intercepted a suspicious cargo vessel in the waters off Tsing Yi. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized a total of about 42 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside four 40-foot containers on board the vessel. Seven non-local men, aged between 28 and 51, suspected to be connected with the case were arrested and they comprise a captain and six crew members. The arrested captain, aged 47, will be charged with one count of importing unmanifested cargoes. He will appear at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (October 21).

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.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 182 80 80 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form

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

