

Hong Kong Customs detects large-scale sea smuggling case involving illicit cigarette with seizure worth about \$67 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (January 22) detected a large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling case in the waters off Tsing Yi and seized about 15 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$67 million and a duty potential of about \$49 million, on board a fishing vessel.

Customs in the early morning of yesterday intercepted a suspicious fishing vessel in the waters off Tsing Yi. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized about 15 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside the compartments of the vessel. During the operation, four non-local men, aged between 32 and 60, suspected to be connected with the case were arrested.

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

The four arrested men were charged with one count of importing unmanifested cargoes. They will appear at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (January 24).

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 upon conviction.

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/).

