

Hong Kong Customs detects largest cigarette smuggling case in past two decades (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (May 27) seized about 33 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$90 million and a duty potential of about \$63 million in Yuen Long and Sheung Shui. The amount of illicit cigarettes seized in this smuggling case has broken Customs' records in the past two decades.

During an anti-illicit cigarette operation conducted in Yuen Long and Sheung Shui yesterday, Customs officers intercepted two container trucks in Lau Fau Shan and Sheung Shui and seized about 22 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside the two containers. After an initial investigation, Customs officers intercepted another container truck at a container yard in Lau Fau Shan and further seized about 11 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside the container.

During the operation, Customs officers arrested three men, aged between 49 and 64, and detained three containers suspected to be in connection with the case.

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.

Together with the seizures in this case, Customs has so far this year seized about 186 million suspected illicit cigarettes, which has reached 90 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 combat 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 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

