

Hong Kong Customs detects largest smuggling cigarettes case in past two decades through international co-operation (with photo)

Through the international co-operation plan "Project Crocodile", Hong Kong Customs detected a smuggling case with the largest amount of illicit cigarettes. During the operation conducted on February 17 and February 18, a total of about 31 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$85 million and a duty potential of about \$59 million were seized in Yuen Long, Man Kam To and Tuen Mun respectively. About 2 500 litres of suspected duty-not-paid liquor with an estimated market value of about \$3 million and a duty potential of about \$1 million were also seized. The total market value and duty potential of the seizures is about \$88 million and about \$60 million respectively.

During an anti-illicit cigarette operation conducted at two logistics sites in Yuen Long and a container terminal in Man Kam To on February 17, Customs officers first seized about 22 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 2 500 litres of suspected duty-not-paid liquor.

Later, Customs officers inspected a 40-foot container declared to be carrying furniture arriving in Hong Kong at the Customs Cargo Examination Compound of the River Trade Terminal in Tuen Mun on February 18, and seized about 9 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside the container.

During the operation, Customs officers arrested four men, aged between 24 and 41, and detained a truck suspected to be in connection with the case and five containers arriving in Hong Kong.

Investigation is ongoing.

Hong Kong Customs has started to participate in the "Project Crocodile" international co-operation plan in 2004 to jointly monitor with other participating Customs Administrations the movement of all suspicious cigarette shipments when they are imported, re-exported or transshipped across Customs territories. Through intelligence exchanges under the immediate notification system, Hong Kong Customs will take appropriate enforcement actions.

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.

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).

