

Hong Kong Customs detects sea smuggling case and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$33 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs conducted an enforcement operation yesterday (September 12) in waters west of Aberdeen and seized about 7.4 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$33 million and a duty potential of about \$24 million, in a tugboat.

During the anti-smuggling operation conducted in south-western waters of Hong Kong yesterday early morning, Customs, through intelligence analysis, spotted a suspicious tugboat heading from the south of Lamma Island to Aberdeen. Officers then immediately intercepted the tugboat and found a total of 730 carton boxes which contained about 7.4 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside two suspected altered compartments of the boat. The tugboat was also detained for further investigation.

During the operation, Customs officers arrested three men, aged between 26 and 57, who declared themselves to be the crew members. They were suspected to be connected with the case.

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

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.

Customs reminds members of the public that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes. 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) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

