

Hong Kong Customs detects sea smuggling case involving cigarettes and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$74 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs on April 13 detected a suspected illicit cigarette smuggling case involving a barge in the waters off Tsing Yi. About 20 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$74 million and a duty potential of about \$50 million were seized.

Through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and data analysis, Customs on the evening of April 12 intercepted a suspicious barge in the waters off Tsing Yi. The next day, upon inspection, Customs officers seized the batch of suspected illicit cigarettes inside two 40-foot containers on board the barge.

During the operation, Customs officers arrested three men, aged between 24 and 54, suspected to be connected 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.

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.

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).

