

Hong Kong Customs detects third case this year involving over 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (April 21) seized about 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes in Yuen Long with an estimated market value of about \$28 million and a duty potential of about \$19 million. This is the third case detected by Customs this year involving more than 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes.

During an anti-illicit cigarette operation conducted in Yuen Long yesterday, Customs officers seized the batch of suspected illicit cigarettes from a truck and a 40-foot-long container inside a scrap metal yard. Two men, aged 40 and 34, were arrested.

Upon initial investigation, Customs believed that the illicit cigarette syndicate had adopted a circuitous route to transship the illicit cigarettes to Hong Kong in an attempt to evade law enforcement agencies.

Investigation is ongoing.

Customs detected this large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling case with more than 10 million in quantity again following detection of the smuggling case in February this year with the largest amount of illicit cigarettes in the past two decades, in which about 31 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized, and a seizure of about 10.2 million suspected illicit cigarettes made in March. This has demonstrated that the strategy of tackling at source has proved to be an effective way to cut the illicit cigarette supply chain. Customs will continue to adopt this strategy and spare no effort in combating illicit cigarette activities for protection of revenue.

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).

