

Hong Kong Customs detects three large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling cases and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$160 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs detected three large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling cases from July 23 to 26 and seized a total of about 57 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$160 million and a duty potential of about \$110 million in Fanling, Yuen Long, Tuen Mun and Tsing Yi.

During an anti-illicit cigarette operation conducted in Ping Che, Fanling, on July 23, Customs officers seized about 11 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside a 40-foot container at a metal hut.

After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers searched a container yard in Yuen Long, a car park in Tuen Mun and two car parks in Tsing Yi on July 25 and 26. Four 40-foot containers and a 20-foot container were discovered to have concealed suspected illicit cigarettes inside. The total seizure amount was about 46 million.

During the operation, Customs officers arrested two men suspected to be connected with the cases who are aged 35 and 36. Six containers suspected to be involved in the cases were also detained.

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.

Including the suspected illicit cigarettes seized in this operation, Customs has seized about 334 million suspected illicit cigarettes this year as at July 31, an increase of about 37 per cent compared to the figure for the same period last year.

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 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).

