

[Hong Kong Customs detects two large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling cases with seizures worth about \\$150 million \(with photo\)](#)

As the Christmas and New Year holidays are approaching, Hong Kong Customs mounted special anti-illicit cigarette operations in the past week to intercept illicit cigarettes in the upper stream and detected two large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling cases on December 1 and 7. About 53 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$150 million and a duty potential of about \$100 million, were seized in Tai Kok Tsui and Sheung Shui.

In the first case, Customs officers intercepted two container trucks near Hoi Fai Road, Tai Kok Tsui, in the morning of December 1. Upon inspection, about 21 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized inside two 40-foot containers. Two male drivers, aged 54 and 60, suspected to be connected with the case were arrested. After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers searched two 40-foot containers inside a container yard at Jockey Club Road and a metal hut at Man Kam To Road in Sheung Shui respectively on the same day, and further seized about 21 million suspected illicit cigarettes.

In the second case, Customs officers intercepted a container truck inside a container yard near Tai Tau Leng Village in Sheung Shui in the evening of December 7. Upon inspection, about 11 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized inside a 40-foot container. A 58-year-old male driver suspected to be connected with the case was arrested.

Investigations of the two above-mentioned cases are ongoing. Customs will continue to trace the source and flow of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Including the suspected illicit cigarettes seized in this operation, Customs had seized about 694 million suspected illicit cigarettes this year as at December 7, exceeding last year's total seizure amount of about 427 million suspected illicit cigarettes by 60 per cent.

As the Christmas and New Year holidays are approaching, Customs believes that illicit cigarette syndicates took the opportunity to smuggle a large quantity of illicit cigarettes in order to ensure a stable supply for the local or overseas illicit cigarette markets. Moreover, the syndicate stored illicit cigarettes in different districts in order to diversify the risk and to minimise the loss after being detected.

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).

