

Hong Kong Customs raids two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres and seizes tobacco products worth about \$14 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (September 18) conducted anti-illicit cigarette operations in Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai, and raided two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres. A total of about 3.6 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 130 kilograms of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco, with a total estimated market value of about \$14 million and a duty potential of about \$9.6 million, were seized.

In the first case, Customs officers raided a metal hut on Kung Um Road, Yuen Long, yesterday at noon and seized about 1.7 million suspected illicit cigarettes therein. Upon a follow-up investigation, a 29-year-old woman who is suspected to be connected with the case was arrested at night. She was the tenant of the metal hut.

In the second case, Customs officers yesterday afternoon seized about 1.9 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 130kg of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco inside a metal hut in Ha San Wai Tsuen, Tin Shui Wai, successfully smashing another suspected illicit cigarette storage centre. A 43-year-old man, who claimed to be a warehouse keeper and is suspected to be connected with the case, was arrested.

The above two cases are still under investigation. Customs believes that syndicates were trying to store a large number of illicit cigarettes before the Mid-Autumn Festival and the National Day holidays to meet the increasing demand during the long holidays, and smuggle the illicit cigarettes to overseas regions.

Customs will continue to combat illicit cigarette activities on all fronts through a multi-pronged approach.

Customs stresses 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/).

