

Hong Kong Customs raids two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (August 14) conducted anti-illicit cigarette operations in Yuen Long and raided two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres. A total of about 1.44 million suspected illicit cigarettes with a total estimated market value of about \$5.3 million and a duty potential of about \$3.6 million were seized.

In the first case, Customs officers raided a metal hut in Tai Kei Leng, Yuen Long, last night and seized about 990 000 suspected illicit cigarettes therein. A 34-year-old man suspected to be connected with the case was also arrested.

In the second case, Customs officers on the same night further seized about 450 000 suspected illicit cigarettes inside a metal hut on Kung Um Road, Yuen Long, successfully smashing another suspected illicit cigarette storage centre.

Customs believes that the two metal huts were used as illicit cigarette storage centres by an illicit cigarette syndicate. The syndicate used metal huts in remote and concealed areas as a cover, which was intended to increase the difficulties for law enforcement by Customs. Moreover, the syndicate stored illicit cigarettes in different places in order to diversify the risk and minimise the loss after being detected. An initial investigation revealed that the suspected illicit cigarette storage centres involved in the two cases were mainly used to supply illicit cigarettes to residents in the New Territories.

The arrested man will be charged with "dealing with goods to which the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance applies" and will appear at the Tuen Mun Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (August 16).

Customs will continue to combat illicit cigarette activities at 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/).

