

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected illicit cigarettes and manufactured tobacco worth about \$28.8 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs seized about 9 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 1 300 kg suspected illicit manufactured tobacco with an estimated market value of about \$28.8 million and a duty potential of about \$20 million in Tsuen Wan, Kowloon Bay, Sheung Shui and Tuen Mun respectively from October 5 to yesterday (October 11).

Through intelligence exchange and analysis with Australian Border Force, Customs officers inspected batches of parcels destined for Australia from Hong Kong at two logistics centres of courier company in Tsuen Wan and the Central Mail Centre in Kowloon Bay in the past week. About 2.9 million suspected illicit cigarettes and about 1 300 kg suspected illicit manufactured tobacco were found in the parcels.

Upon follow-up investigation, Customs officers yesterday afternoon further seized about 6 million suspected illicit cigarettes and a batch of packing tools from a lorry in Sheung Shui and an industrial unit in Tuen Mun, suspected to be connected to the batches of parcels destined for Australia. Part of the suspected illicit cigarettes seized were overseas brands.

During the operation, five men suspected to be connected to the case, aged between 30 and 45, were arrested and a lorry was detained.

Customs believes the operation has detected a duty-not-paid cigarettes smuggling case to Australia and will continue to trace the source of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Customs has so far seized over 300 million suspected illicit cigarettes this year, amounting to 50 per cent more than last year's total seizure.

Customs will continue its multi-pronged enforcement approach to combat illicit cigarette activities on all fronts, including cross-boundary smuggling, storage, distribution and peddling of illicit cigarettes.

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).

