

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected illicit cigarettes (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs seized a total of about 2 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$5.6 million and a duty potential of about \$3.9 million in Tsing Yi and Kowloon Bay on March 18 and yesterday (March 24) respectively.

Customs officers inspected a cargo consignment heading for Australia, declared as carrying toy models, at a logistics site in Tsing Yi on March 18. Upon inspection, Customs officers found about 500 000 suspected illicit cigarettes inside 24 cartons mix-loaded with six boxes of toys. After follow-up investigation, Customs officers yesterday further seized about 1.5 million suspected illicit cigarettes and a batch of toys suspected to be used as camouflage at an industrial building unit in Kowloon Bay. A 26-year-old man suspected to be connected with the case was arrested.

Customs believes that the operation has led to the detection of a case of smuggling duty-not-paid cigarette to Australia and will continue to trace the source of the illicit cigarettes.

Investigation is ongoing. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

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).

