

Hong Kong Customs shuts down underground cigarette factory and seizes tobacco products worth about \$22 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs launched an anti-illicit cigarette operation on October 29, shutting down an underground cigarette factory in Tuen Mun. A total of about 3.3 million of suspected illicit cigarettes and about 1 100 kilograms of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco, with a total estimated market value of about \$22 million and a duty potential of about \$15 million, were seized.

Based on intelligence analysis, Customs identified an industrial building unit in Tuen Mun for an in-depth investigation. On the evening of October 29, Customs officers intercepted and arrested four men and three women, aged between 35 and 63, outside the unit. Six of them were suspected illegal workers. In addition, an illegal cigarette production line was found in the unit, which included a number of machines for producing and packaging illicit cigarettes, as well as a large amount of raw materials used for manufacturing illicit cigarettes. After counting, Customs seized about 3.3 million of suspected illicit cigarettes and about 1 100kg of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco at the scene, dismantling an underground cigarette factory exploiting illegal workers.

The seven arrested persons have been charged with "dealing with goods to which the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance applies" and will appear at the Tuen Mun Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (November 1). Customs will continue to trace the source of the batch of raw materials of the illicit cigarettes and the production line-related machines. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Customs reminds citizens that they must be vigilant when purchasing cigarettes. They should patronise reputable merchants or stores and not purchase cigarettes from unknown sources to avoid threats to their health.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, a person shall not, except under and in accordance with a licence, manufacture tobacco. Also, 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 182 8080 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/).

