

Hong Kong Customs smashes liquor smuggling syndicate (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs detected three suspected cases of smuggling illicit liquor through seaborne containers between late May and early September. A total of about 350 litres in 550 bottles of suspected duty-not-paid liquor, about 3 240 litres in 3 730 bottles of suspected smuggled sake, about 130 litres in 380 cans of suspected smuggled beer and a batch of suspected smuggled assorted goods were seized. The total estimated market value was about \$1.2 million with a duty potential of about \$150,000. Customs believes that a liquor smuggling syndicate has been successfully smashed.

Through risk assessment, Customs officers inspected a total of four seaborne containers, arriving in Hong Kong from Japan declared to be carrying used auto parts and accessories, at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound on May 22, August 13 and the day before yesterday (September 9) respectively.

Upon inspection, Customs officers found the batch of suspected duty-not-paid liquor and suspected smuggled sake and beer inside the containers. A batch of suspected smuggled assorted goods, including pet supplies and daily necessities, was also seized.

After an initial investigation, it was revealed that the consignees of the containers involved in the three cases were the same company. Four persons suspected to be connected with the cases, including two men and two women aged between 30 and 64 comprising three company directors and a company secretary, were arrested.

An investigation is ongoing.

Customs will continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis and step up enforcement actions for interception at source to combat illicit liquor activities for protection of revenue.

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, any person who imports, possesses, sells or buys dutiable commodities without a valid licence 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 liquor and smuggling activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

