

## [Hong Kong Customs steps up enforcement to combat illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities and detects two large-scale illicit cigarette cases \(with photo\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a territory-wide enforcement operation codenamed "Thunder" over the past two months to combat illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities in public rental housing (PRH). On September 2, Customs detected two large-scale illicit cigarette cases. A total of about 18.2 million suspected illicit cigarettes and 740 kilograms of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco, with a total estimated market value of about \$86.6 million and a duty potential of about \$63.1 million, were seized.

In response to criminals exploiting young people to engage in illicit cigarette activities during the summer holiday, Customs stepped up enforcement against illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities in PRH from July 8 to August 31. During the operation, Customs officers detected 148 illicit cigarette cases in different districts, including Sham Shui Po, Tuen Mun, Wong Tai Sin, Sau Mau Ping, Ngau Tau Kok and Yau Tong. A total of about 1.3 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized. Among the cases, two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres and two vehicles suspected to be used for illicit cigarette distribution were involved.

In the above-mentioned operation, Customs arrested 127 men and 22 women, aged between 15 and 78, including six teenagers under the age of 18. Most of the arrested persons purchased the illicit cigarettes for personal use, and all cases have been duly followed up.

Moreover, after recent in-depth investigations and intelligence analysis, Customs raided a logistics warehouse in Man Kam To at noon on September 2 to inspect a batch of suspicious goods, resulting in the seizure of about 4.9 million suspected illicit cigarettes and 740kg of suspected duty-not-paid manufactured tobacco.

On the afternoon of the same day, Customs officers conducted an anti-illicit cigarette operation in the vicinity of Tuen Mun. They intercepted three suspicious men in an industrial building unit and seized about 9 million suspected illicit cigarettes therein. The three men were immediately arrested. After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers seized about 53 000 suspected illicit cigarettes in a truck on the ground floor of the industrial building, and further seized 2.7 million suspected illicit cigarettes from a nearby industrial building.

The two cases mentioned above are still under investigation, and the three arrested persons were released on bail pending further investigation.

Customs reminds young people, especially students, not to involve in illicit cigarette activities or distribution of illicit cigarette flyers, to avoid creating a criminal record that may affect their future.

Customs will continue to step up enforcement to vigorously combat illicit cigarette activities through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and interception at source. If PRH units are found to be involved in illicit cigarette activities, Customs will notify the Housing Department for follow-up action after the conclusion of court proceedings.

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](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)) or online form ([eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002](http://eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002)).

