

Hong Kong Customs steps up enforcement to combat illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$10 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a territory-wide enforcement operation codenamed "Thunder" in the past three weeks to combat illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities in public rental housing (PRH). A total of about 2.8 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$10 million and a duty potential of about \$7 million were seized.

During the operation, Customs officers detected 44 illicit cigarette cases in different districts, including Kwun Tong, Wong Tai Sin, Sau Mau Ping, Kowloon Bay, Sham Shui Po, Yau Tong, Kowloon City, Tai Kok Tsui, Lam Tin, Choi Hung, To Kwa Wan, Tseung Kwan O, Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun, Tin Shui Wai, Yuen Long, Sheung Shui, Ma On Shan, Kwai Chung, Tsing Yi and Tung Chung, resulting in the above-mentioned seizures of suspected illicit cigarettes. In those cases, Customs officers raided three suspected illicit cigarette storage centres, detained two vehicles suspected to be used for illicit cigarette distribution, and seized a batch of illicit cigarette leaflets.

In the above-mentioned cases, Customs arrested 39 men and six women, aged between 16 and 75. They include both illicit cigarette sellers and buyers. All the cases have been duly followed up.

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.

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Customs reminds young people, especially students, to never become involved in illicit cigarette activities or distribute illicit cigarette flyers, to avoid creating a criminal record that affects their future.

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) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

