

Hong Kong Customs summarises effectiveness of territory-wide large-scale anti-illicit cigarette enforcement operation "Tempest" (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a territory-wide large-scale enforcement operation codenamed "Tempest" between February 29 and May 14 to step up efforts to combat illicit cigarette activities on all fronts at each control point and all districts across the territory in Hong Kong. Throughout the operation, Customs detected a total of 4 726 related cases and seized about 139 million suspected illicit cigarettes, about 105 kilograms of cigars, and about 1 525kg of manufactured tobacco products, with a total estimated market value of about \$625 million and a duty potential of about \$454 million. During the operation, Customs arrested 4 347 persons aged between 15 and 89, and detained 26 vehicles suspected to be used for illicit cigarette distribution.

A Customs spokesman said today (May 28), "In order to identify duty-paid cigarettes more effectively, Hong Kong Customs will collaborate with relevant policy bureaux to conduct feasibility studies and promote the implementation of a duty-paid labelling system."

Customs will continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis for interception at source, together with raids in-town, to crack down on the distribution, storage, and peddling of illicit cigarettes on all fronts.

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.

Customs reminds members of the public that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes and that conviction would lead to a criminal record. 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).

