

Man sentenced for illegal possession of alternative smoking products and Part 1 poison

A 28-year-old man was sentenced to 160 hours' community service order at the Fanling Magistrates' Courts today (May 14) for illegal possession of alternative smoking products (ASPs) and Part 1 poison.

On December 20, 2022, the Police found the man involved in the case transporting ASPs using a lorry parked near Ping Yeung Chuen, Fanling. Over 50 000 pieces of nicotine-containing electronic cigarette product were found inside the lorry. The case was referred to the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health (DH) for further investigation.

The Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) prohibits the promotion, manufacture, sale and possession for commercial purposes of ASPs. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

According to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138), nicotine (except tobacco) is listed as a Part 1 poison, which can only be sold at pharmacies under the supervision of registered pharmacists. Illegal sale or possession of Part 1 poisons are criminal offences. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$100,000 and two years' imprisonment.

Since the ban on ASPs came into effect on April 30, 2022, the TACO has issued 635 summonses to offenders for importing ASPs, resulting in 353 convicted cases with fines up to \$24,000 as at March 31, 2024. Over the same period, the TACO has issued 18 summonses to offenders for suspected sale or possession for commercial purposes of ASPs, of which 11 cases (involving 17 summonses) were convicted with a maximum penalty of two months' imprisonment.

A spokesman for the DH said that the department will continue to take stringent enforcement action. The spokesman also cautioned against the use of any ASPs and stressed that these products contain amounts of nicotine similar to those of conventional cigarettes in order to sustain addiction. In addition, health hazards of long-term exposure to these new products are unknown. The Government appeals to smokers to quit smoking as early as possible for their own health and that of others. They are encouraged to call the DH's Integrated Smoking Cessation Hotline on 1833 183. The hotline is operated by registered nurses and provides professional counselling services on smoking cessation. Information on smoking cessation can also be obtained from www.livetobaccofree.hk/en/index.html.

Executive Council approves taxi fare adjustments

The Chief Executive in Council approved today (May 14) adjustments to the urban, New Territories (NT) and Lantau taxi fares, with increases of \$2 in flagfall charge, \$0.2 in the incremental charge for the first-tier distance after flagfall, and \$0.1 in the incremental charge for the second-tier distance after flagfall. Details of the new fares are as follows:

	Flagfall charge for the first 2 kilometres or any part thereof		
	Urban taxis	NT taxis	Lantau taxis
Existing fare	\$27	\$23.5	\$22
New fare	\$29	\$25.5	\$24

	Incremental charge for each 200 metres travelled after flagfall		
	Urban taxis	NT taxis	Lantau taxis
First-tier distance	2-9km	2-8km	2-20km
Existing fare	\$1.9 per jump	\$1.7 per jump	\$1.7 per jump
New fare	\$2.1 per jump	\$1.9 per jump	\$1.9 per jump

	Second-tier distance after 9km	after 8km	after 20km
Existing fare	\$1.3 per jump	\$1.3 per jump	\$1.5 per jump
New fare	\$1.4 per jump	\$1.4 per jump	\$1.6 per jump

There will be corresponding adjustments to the charge for the waiting time as a result of the increase in incremental charges after flagfall, while the other additional charges will remain unchanged.

"Taxis provide personalised point-to-point public transport service to the general public. In recent years, there have been calls from both the community and the taxi trade for the Government to implement initiatives to enhance the quality and sustainability of taxi services. In view of the above, the Government had earlier on reviewed the overall taxi operation and management, and launched a series of measures with a view to enhancing the quality of taxi services and promoting the development of the taxi industry. Such measures include introducing a taxi fleet regime, increasing the maximum passenger seating capacity of taxis from five to six, and introducing a Taxi-Driver-Offence Points System and a two-tier penalty system for certain taxi-driver-related offences. Following the passage of the relevant legislative amendments by the Legislative Council (LegCo) in December last year, the aforementioned measures are being implemented progressively with a view to enhancing service quality and the overall image of the taxi trade. Apart from

these measures, it is also important to review the taxi fares and the financial viability of taxi operation at appropriate junctures in order to ensure the healthy development of the taxi trade in the long run and maintain a stable supply of taxi services to cater for passengers' needs," a spokesman for the Transport and Logistics Bureau said.

Among the series of measures mentioned above, the taxi fleet regime is a new regulatory regime. Under the taxi fleet regime, the Transport Department (TD) will issue Taxi Fleet Licences and regulate the operation and management of taxi fleets through licensing conditions, including the requirements in relation to fleet size, age of vehicles and services to be provided by fleet licensees, such as the provision of online booking channels (including mobile applications and websites) and e-payment means, as well as the installation of CCTV systems and technological devices to enhance driving safety inside the compartments. The TD has issued the invitation for applications for Taxi Fleet Licences on April 12 with a view to announcing the results in mid-2024. Taking into account the time needed for setting up a taxi fleet, the TD will require taxi fleet operators to commence operation in not more than 12 months after the grant of Taxi Fleet Licences (i.e. no later than mid-2025). The Government will encourage and assist the trade to form taxi fleets and commence operation as early as practicable.

Regarding taxi fare increase applications, the urban, NT and Lantau taxi trades reached a consensus on their respective fare increase applications in March 2023 for increasing the flagfall charge by \$5, \$4.5 and \$6 respectively, the incremental charges for the first-tier distance after flagfall by \$0.2, \$0.2 and \$0.1 respectively, and the incremental charges for the second-tier distance after flagfall by \$0.2. The urban taxi trade also asked for shortening the waiting time of a hired taxi not in motion from 60 seconds to 45 seconds per jump. In addition, the urban and NT taxi trades applied for an increase in additional fare of \$1 for every article of baggage carried and \$2 for every animal or bird carried. As for the Lantau taxi trade, it applied for an increase in additional fare of \$2 for every article of baggage carried, \$3 for every animal or bird carried, and \$3 for every hiring arranged through telephone booking.

"According to the operating data, while the average monthly net income of urban and NT rentee-drivers in 2023 increased slightly as compared with the 2019 level after netting off inflation, Lantau rentee-drivers experienced a drop in their average monthly net income. As for owner-drivers and rentor-owners, their average monthly net income in 2023 dropped significantly as compared with that of 2019. As shown from the operating data, the taxi trade is facing genuine difficulty in maintaining the financial viability of its operation at the current taxi fare level. The taxi trade hopes that an increase in taxi fares would raise the income of front-line drivers and attract more newcomers to join the industry, while at the same time encouraging taxi operators to improve their services and invest more in new facilities, thereby enhancing the overall taxi service quality and fostering the healthy development of the trade in the long run," the spokesman continued.

"The Government consulted the Panel on Transport of the LegCo and the Transport Advisory Committee in April 2024. A fare increase will inevitably lead to higher transportation expenses for passengers. In processing the current fare increase applications, the Government has duly considered various factors, including public acceptability, changes in taxi operating costs and income of taxi operators, as well as the fare differentials between taxis and other modes of public transport, and has struck a balance between maintaining the financial viability of taxi operation and public acceptability. Under the Government's recommendation, the average rates of fare increase are 8.86 per cent, 9.56 per cent and 10.92 per cent for urban, NT and Lantau taxis respectively, with a weighted average rate of increase of 8.98 per cent, which is lower than the rate of increase under the trade's proposal," the spokesman said.

The Government will table the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulation 2024 at the LegCo on May 22, 2024, for negative vetting in order to adjust the taxi fares. Upon completion of the procedure, the new fares are expected to take effect from July 14, 2024.

[Hong Kong Customs detects smuggling case involving about \\$160 million of goods by ocean-going vessel \(with photos\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs on May 7 detected a suspected case of using an ocean-going vessel to smuggle goods to Taiwan at the Kwai Chung Container Terminals. A large batch of unmanifested goods with an estimated market value of about \$160 million was seized inside two containers.

Through intelligence analysis and risk assessment, Customs discovered that criminals intended to use ocean-going vessels to smuggle goods and thus formulated strategies to combat related activities, and identified an ocean-going vessel preparing to depart from Hong Kong to Kaohsiung, Taiwan, for inspection. After examination, Customs officers found a large batch of unmanifested goods, including suspected scheduled dried shark fins and skins, suspected scheduled wood furniture, electronic components and electronic products, inside two containers on board the vessel.

An investigation is ongoing and the likelihood of arrests is not ruled out.

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 Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting an endangered species without a required licence is liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years.

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Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling 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).



[Analytical Accounts of the Exchange Fund](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) released today (May 14) the key analytical accounts of the Exchange Fund at the end of April 2024.

Foreign assets, representing the external assets of the Exchange Fund, decreased during the month by HK\$60.9 billion to HK\$3,460.2 billion.

The Monetary Base, comprising Certificates of Indebtedness, Government-issued currency notes and coins in circulation, the balance of the banking system and Exchange Fund Bills and Notes issued, amounted to HK\$1,916.2 billion.

Claims on the private sector in Hong Kong amounted to HK\$305.1 billion.

Foreign liabilities amounted to HK\$22.3 billion.

The analytical accounts of the Exchange Fund are released in accordance with the International Monetary Fund's Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) and are referred to as the Analytical Accounts of the Central Bank under SDDS (Annex).

At present, four press releases relating to the Exchange Fund's data are issued by the HKMA each month. Three of these releases are issued to disseminate monetary data in accordance with the International Monetary Fund's SDDS. The fourth press release, on the Exchange Fund's Abridged Balance Sheet and Currency Board Account, is made in accordance with the HKMA's policy of maintaining a high level of transparency. For the month of May 2024, the scheduled dates for issuing the press releases are as follows:

May 7 (Issued)	SDDS International Reserves (Hong Kong's Latest Foreign Currency Reserve Assets Figures)
May 14	SDDS Analytical Accounts of the Central Bank (Analytical Accounts of the Exchange Fund)
May 31	SDDS Template on International Reserves and Foreign Currency Liquidity
May 31	Exchange Fund Abridged Balance Sheet and Currency Board Account

Tentative issuance schedule for Exchange Fund Bills and Notes

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) issued today (May 14) a tentative issuance schedule for Exchange Fund Bills and Notes (EFBNs) for the coming quarter of July to September 2024. The schedule contains information

on the tentative tender dates, issue sizes and issue dates of individual issues, representing rollover of maturing issues and taking into account planned adjustments to the maturity spectrum of the EFBN portfolio.

The quarterly schedule is issued in the second month of each quarter (i.e. February, May, August and November), covering the EFBN tenders in the following quarter.

It should be noted that the tender dates, issue sizes and issue dates projected in the advance issuance schedule are tentative. The details of new issues of Exchange Fund Bills are to be confirmed and announced at least four business days prior to the respective tender dates. The details of new issues of Exchange Fund Notes are to be confirmed and announced seven business days prior to their respective tender dates. The HKMA may make changes in the light of prevailing market conditions.