



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS 新加坡关税局 KASTAM SINGAPURA சிங்கப்பூர் கங்கத்துறை

MEDIA RELEASE

25 January 2013

You hide, we seek

Demand for contraband cigarettes remains persistent with more smokers caught for buying contraband cigarettes last year.

Singapore Customs has stepped up enforcement efforts and collaboration with other enforcement agencies to curb the selling, buying and possession of contraband cigarettes.

In the face of strong enforcement efforts, peddlers have become increasingly discreet in plying their trade, operating in back lanes and stashing their contraband cigarettes in seemingly ordinary-looking receptacles such as abandoned furniture and appliances.

Among the hiding places Singapore Customs enforcement officers found contraband cigarettes were signboards and abandoned refrigerators.

When dismantled, the signboard revealed a compartment with an assortment of contraband cigarettes. Peddlers also hid their illegal stash in empty compartments below abandoned refrigerators.



Contraband cigarettes found hidden in a signboard compartment.



The compartment at the bottom of an abandoned refrigerator was used to store contraband cigarettes.

In another case, a peddler who sold contraband cigarettes from his house, modified a cupboard in his house to include an additional compartment at the back. Confident that his stash of contraband cigarettes was safe, the peddler “welcomed” Singapore Customs officers to search his house. His luck run out as the well-trained officers were able to find the hidden compartment with cigarettes stored in it.



More than meets the eye: contraband cigarettes hidden in a compartment behind a cupboard.

Even letter boxes are not spared as peddlers go out of their way to evade detection. One letter box can easily contain more than 10 packets of contraband cigarettes.



Biscuit tins and rice cookers are the hiding places of choice for some peddlers.



Illegal cigarettes hidden in biscuit tins.



A rice cooker was used to hide illegal cigarettes.

One “creative” peddler even recycled plastic bags used to wrap bread to conceal contraband cigarettes. The plastic bags of contraband cigarettes were kept in his motorcycle storage box, ready for sale.



Illegal cigarettes wrapped in recycled plastic bags stored in a motorcycle storage box.

With Singapore Customs officers hot on the heels of both peddlers and suppliers, suppliers have resorted to using appliances such as air compressors and water heaters to bring in illegal cigarettes.

One supplier hid more than 18,000 packets of illegal cigarettes inside 26 air compressors, but this did not escape the keen eyes of Singapore Customs enforcement officers, who chiselled open the air compressors.





Illegal cigarettes hidden in air compressors.

In another case, suppliers tried to outsmart Singapore Customs officers by hiding their illegal cigarettes in water heaters. They packed about 340 packets of cigarettes in each water heater. They failed to outsmart the enforcement officers.



Contraband cigarettes packed inside the water heaters.



A total of 9,520 packets of illegal cigarettes were found concealed in the 28 water heaters

No matter how hard peddlers and suppliers try to evade detection, Singapore Customs will remain vigilant, continue with rigorous enforcement efforts, and work closely with other enforcement agencies to curb the illicit trade of contraband cigarettes.

Buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with duty-unpaid goods are serious offences under the Customs Act and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act. Offenders will be severely dealt with. They can be fined up to 40 times the amount of duty evaded, and/or jailed for up to six years.

The minimum court fine for first-time and repeat offenders of tobacco-related offences is \$2,000 and \$4,000 respectively. Repeat offenders who are caught with more than two kilogrammes of tobacco products will also face mandatory jail sentences. Vehicles used in the commission of such offences are also liable to be forfeited.

Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of Customs duty or GST can call the Singapore Customs hotline on 1800-2330000 or email customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg.

#