



“OPERATION SWEEP” A SUCCESS – 17 ARRESTED AND OVER 83,000 PACKETS DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTES SEIZED

Singapore Customs conducted Operation Sweep, a series of raids targeted at suspect warehouses and stores used by syndicate smugglers for storage and as distribution points for contraband cigarettes. The first wave of the raids conducted at Merbok Crescent and Fajar Road on 31 Mar 2006 resulted in 10 arrested and 13,390 packets (or 1,339 cartons) of contraband cigarettes and over 4,000 uncensored/obscene optical discs seized. Following the arrests, Singapore Customs officers conducted a series of follow-up raids in different parts of the island on 5 and 6 Apr 2006. Seven male Singaporeans were arrested and a total of 69,803 packets duty-unpaid cigarettes seized. The estimated market value of the contraband cigarettes is \$733,800 and the total duty and GST payable is \$561,635.

Case 1

On 5 Apr, at about 2.10 pm, Customs officers intercepted 2 vans along Bedok Reservoir Road. The vans were checked and the officers found a total of 14,210 packets (1,421 cartons) of duty-unpaid cigarettes. The drivers, 2 male Singaporeans (aged 38 and 51) were arrested and the cigarettes and vehicles were seized.

Case 2

Meanwhile at about 4.15 pm, another Customs party keeping surveillance outside an office warehouse at Playfair Road saw a man driving off after having loaded boxes suspected to contain contraband cigarettes into his car. Officers intercepted his car and found the boxes to contain 1,750 packets cigarettes. He was immediately placed under arrest. Officers also detained a 2nd man who had just come out of the warehouse. The driver of a second car which entered the premises was questioned. He admitted that he had come to collect cigarettes from the 2nd man. A 4th man who was in the warehouse was also arrested. Inside the warehouse were a total of 19,343 packets of duty unpaid cigarettes. The 4 men arrested were Singaporeans, aged 55, 46, 27 and 38.

Case 3

On the same day at about 5.40 pm, another party of Customs officers trailed a car to a carpark at Joo Chiat Place. Upon checking, officers found a total 3,000 packets (or 300 cartons) of duty unpaid cigarettes. The driver, a male Singaporean aged 51 was arrested and the cigarettes and the car seized.

Case 4

On 6 Apr 2006 at about 4.00 pm, Customs officers seized 31,500 packets (or 3,150 cartons) of duty unpaid cigarettes from a warehouse at the Tanjong Pagar Distripark. Investigations are underway.

All the 7 persons arrested in the first 3 cases will be charged in Court for offences under the Customs and GST Act on 7 Apr 2006.

The series of raids in “Operation Sweep” conducted on 31 Mar, and 5 and 6 Apr 2006 have successfully crippled a key syndicate that supplied contraband cigarettes to the Yew Tee peddlers. Altogether, 9 Singaporeans and 8 Chinese nationals (also suspected immigration offenders) were arrested and 83,193 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth about \$860,000 seized. In addition, over 4,000 uncensored and obscene VCDs/DVDs were also seized from the Merbok Crescent flat.

Singapore Customs warns that the storing, possession, conveying or dealing with any contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs Act. Singapore Customs takes a serious view of any attempt to evade duty and tax and will not hesitate to prosecute offenders in court. Upon conviction by the court, first time offenders can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount duty evaded. For the second or subsequent convictions, offenders can be jailed for up to 2 years, as well as being fined. The offenders also face further fines based on the amount of GST evaded. The public are advised against buying duty-unpaid cigarettes. Those caught buying or having in their possession duty-unpaid cigarettes stand to face severe penalties.

We would like to urge anyone with information on any illegal activities involving duty-unpaid cigarettes to contact the Singapore Customs Intelligence Hotline on 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg. Also call us if you know of any person dealing in duty-unpaid cigarettes, either as distributors or sellers or if you have been approached by people who claim that they have cheaper cigarettes for sale.

Released by Singapore Customs
6 Apr 2006