



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MEDIA RELEASE

STEPPED-UP OPERATIONS AGAINST BUYERS - OVER 6,000 FINED FOR BUYING ILLEGAL CIGARETTES

The number of buyers of duty-unpaid cigarettes caught jumped a staggering 165% to 6,012 in year 2007. This was up from 2,268 in year 2006. Singapore Customs attributes this huge spike in numbers to stepped-up island-wide raids against buyers of contraband cigarettes. Clamping down demand for illicit cigarettes at the street level is part of Singapore Customs' tough measures against cigarette smuggling. Other anti-smuggling efforts focussed on inland operations to hit smuggling syndicates at the supply, storage and distribution points.

Composition Sum Increased to \$500 per packet

2 To further deter demand for illegal cigarettes, particularly at the hotspot areas like Geylang and Yew Tee, Singapore Customs has increased the composition sum in November 2007 from \$200 to \$500 for a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes. Of the 6,012 buyers caught, 30% were nabbed at these hotspot areas. The buyers caught were mostly Singaporeans, making up 75% of the number caught.

3 Commenting on the marked increase in the number of buyers caught, Director-General of Customs, Mr Fong Yong Kian said, "The large increase in the number of end-consumers caught is the result of a determined effort from Singapore Customs to flush out demand for contraband cigarettes. The public must stop buying contraband cigarettes. Not only do they face harsh penalties for the offence, the public demand for such cigarettes will continue to breed and fuel cigarette smuggling and peddling. If we can curb demand, our enforcement actions will be more effective. To win this fight against cigarette smuggling, the public therefore has an important role to play to keep contrabands at bay".

A Collective Approach to Strengthen Anti-Cigarette Smuggling Efforts

4 As part of its anti-cigarette smuggling efforts, Singapore Customs works closely with other enforcement agencies such as the Singapore Police Force and Immigration & Checkpoints

Authority (ICA). Immigration offenders who have committed customs offences will be referred to the relevant authorities for follow-ups. Others who are work permit holders may have their work permit revoked and are liable to be repatriated from Singapore.

5 Since January 2008, Singapore Customs has also deployed Certis Cisco officers to strengthen enforcement resources to curb the situation at the Yew Tee area. These Cisco officers are armed and support Singapore Customs officers on a “24-7” basis to further enhance enforcement presence in the area. The officers patrol the area and nab both buyers and illegal peddlers. As many peddlers are illegal immigrants, we are working closely with other related agencies to step up enforcement action. Singapore Customs takes a serious view against motorists including taxi drivers, who stop along the road to purchase cigarettes from illegal peddlers. They not only commit an offence but also pose a serious safety hazard to other road users. For these offenders, Singapore Customs will not hesitate to impose the enhanced fine of \$500 for each packet of illegal cigarettes found and to refer them to the Traffic Police for follow-up action. Singapore Customs has also informed the various taxi companies to advise taxi drivers to help keep contraband cigarettes at bay, and to warn them against buying from illegal peddlers.

Keeping the Situation in Check

6 Singapore Customs has adopted a multi-prong approach by stepping-up inland operations against syndicates, peddlers and end-consumers, conducting joint operations with various enforcement agencies, strengthening enforcement capabilities, enhancing the composition sum quantum, as well as intensifying public education and awareness. However, our enforcement efforts to bring smuggling syndicates to task will become futile if consumers continue to buy contraband cigarettes from illegal peddlers. Those who choose to run foul of the law stand to face severe consequences. So far, the measures taken have shown some operational success. In 2007, 4.4 million packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized, and over 23,000 cigarette offenders caught. Notwithstanding the success recorded thus far, Singapore Customs will continue to step up enforcement capabilities against syndicates and end-consumers to keep the situation in check.

ISSUED BY: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS (新加坡关税局)
DATE: 30 JANUARY 2008