



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MEDIA RELEASE

BUYERS FEEL THE PINCH FROM NEW \$500 FINE SINCE SINGAPORE CUSTOMS STANDARDISES PENALTY ON ILLEGAL CIGARETTES

The new \$500 penalty per packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes imposed on buyers is giving offenders a hard pinch. In the first major island-wide operations from 23 to 24 July 2008 following implementation of the standardised composition amount, 39 buyers were caught and paid a stiff fine of \$500 for a packet of cigarettes. Also arrested and charged were eight peddlers. Over 2,700 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized during the operation. One buyer was also convicted of hurling vulgarities at a Singapore Customs officer during arrest.

First Island-wide Enforcement Operations since Implementation of \$500 Fine

2 From 23 to 24 July 2008, Singapore Customs conducted island-wide enforcement raids at Geylang, Tampines, Bedok, Marsiling, Aljunied, Boon Lay, Jurong East and Woodlands. The operations aimed to target various corners of the island to eradicate peddlers at hotspots and to nab end-consumers of illegal cigarettes. At the end of the operation, eight illegal peddlers were arrested and 2,707 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes seized. The cigarettes were retrieved from various hiding places such as in the back alley rubbish chutes, in unused letter boxes, in electric risers, hanging from tree branches, in the drains, etc. The operations also nabbed 39 buyers who were fined \$500 per packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes.

3 Commenting on the first island-wide operations since the implementation of the standardised \$500 fine, Assistant Director-General of Customs(Intelligence & Investigation), Mr Lee Boon Chong (李文聰), said, "Singapore Customs will continue to mount more enforcement raids island-wide. We are also deploying more uniformed enforcement manpower to step up checks. With a heavier penalty in place, we want to remove the demand

for illegal cigarettes to clamp down illegal peddling and buying activities. We urge the public to support our cause and stay way from illegal cigarettes”.

Buyer Convicted for Hurling Vulgarities at Singapore Customs Officer.

4 A man (Mohd Zahari Bin Matnin, 39-year-old Singaporean) caught in Woodlands received more than just the standard \$500 fine – he was sentenced by the court to fines totalling \$2,200 or in default 17 days imprisonment for three counts of offences under the Customs Act. Mohd Zahari was arrested and charged in court for verbally abusing a Singapore Customs officer and for possession of duty-unpaid cigarettes.

5 On 24 July 2008 at 6.30 pm, Singapore Customs officers conducting enforcement rounds at Causeway Point Shopping Centre spotted Mohd Zahari taking out a cigarette stick from a cigarette packet. Suspecting the packet to be duty-unpaid cigarettes, the officers approached Mohd Zahari. On sighting the officer’s warrant card, Mohd Zahari turned and ran off. He was apprehended and arrested after a short chase. During the arrest, Mohd Zahari continuously shouted vulgarities “F**k You” at the officer.

6 Under the Customs Act, it is an offence for any one who “assaults, abuses or obstructs any officer of customs or other public servant or any person acting in his aid or assistance, or duly employed for the prevention of offences”. Offenders can be fined up to \$10,000 or face imprisonment not exceeding 18 months or to both.

Singapore Customs Seeks Public Cooperation during Enforcement Checks

7 Singapore Customs officers conduct regular inspections to flush out illegal street peddling and end-consumers who buy and smoke duty-unpaid cigarettes. These island-wide operations are part of Singapore Customs' anti-cigarette smuggling measures. When approaching members of the public, officers will as a matter of routine identify themselves and the department. The officers will also produce their warrant cards for verification. Further verification if required, could be obtained from the Singapore Customs hotline at 1800-2330000. In this regard, we request the public to cooperate with our officers when they are conducting their enforcement rounds. Failure to comply with the officers’ request and refusal to provide the necessary information for inspection are offences under the Customs

Act. On conviction, offenders can be fined up to \$5,000 or to imprisonment of up to 12 months or to both.

8 While Singapore Customs is coming down hard on cigarette offenders, members of the public can play a part by not buying any contraband cigarettes from peddlers. Not only do offenders face severe penalties, the public demand for illicit cigarettes will continue to breed and fuel cigarette smuggling and peddling. In the first half of 2008, 1.6 million packets of duty unpaid cigarettes were seized, and 2,549 buyers were caught and fined. Notwithstanding the success recorded thus far, Singapore Customs will continue to step up enforcement capabilities to crush cigarette offenders.

9 Singapore Customs warns that buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs and GST Acts. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. On conviction by the court, offenders can be jailed as well as fined. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture. The public are also advised against buying duty-unpaid cigarettes. To hit buyers even harder, Singapore Customs has also imposed a heavier penalty of \$500 fine per packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes or prosecution in Court.

10 Members of the public who have information on cigarette smuggling or peddling activities can call the Singapore Customs hotline at 1800-2330000 or email customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg.

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Duty-unpaid cigarettes hidden in rubbish chute at a Geylang back alley



Peddlers used abandoned metal boxes to hide duty-unpaid cigarettes.



A vacant stall used by peddlers to stash away duty-unpaid cigarettes



Peddlers hid duty-unpaid hidden in rubbish bins to evade detection by enforcement officers



Cigarettes used for “cooking”? Singapore Customs officers uncovered the loot hidden amongst LPG tanks