



Singapore Customs Media Release

**DON'T SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS PEDDLERS – WARNED
SINGAPORE CUSTOMS
JOINT OPERATION FLUSHED OUT PEDDLING ACTIVITIES AT YEW TEE**

On the night of 27 October 2009, Singapore Customs (SC) conducted an operation to flush out peddlers of illegal cigarettes at Yew Tee Industrial Estate, together with Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) and Singapore Police Force (SPF). A total of 15 foreigners from Indonesia, aged between 25 and 38, were arrested. Over 1,000 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes, worth \$9,400, were seized and the total duty and GST evaded on the cigarettes was close to \$8,500.

2 In a swift operation lasting just half an hour, 15 men were arrested and 378 packets of contraband cigarettes found on them were also seized. Officers then combed through the vicinity and seized another 635 packets of contraband cigarettes.

3 While the operation was swiftly executed, the efforts to plan for the operation began as far as two weeks earlier. Officers spent time monitoring the movements of the peddlers, observed how the peddlers transact with the buyers and recorded the “peak” times for illegal peddling activities when the peddlers were out in action. These field observations were put together by the various agencies involved in the operation to devise the execution plan and enforcement actions to be taken.

4 On the night of operation, officers kept close watch on a group of suspicious-looking foreigners who were carrying red plastic bags and lurking near the forested area at Yew Tee Industrial Estate. Two hours before the strike of midnight, officers moved in and ambushed the men who were suspected to be involved in the peddling of contraband cigarettes. The peddlers’ immediate reactions were that of surprise and shock. Once the “actions” began, the peddlers started to flee in all directions in a futile attempt to escape. Nevertheless, officers remained in “hot pursuits” after these peddlers and eventually subdued them, even though they put up some fierce struggle.

5 Further investigations revealed that 14 of the offenders were illegal immigrants and they were charged in Court on 29 and 30 October 2009.

Advisory from Singapore Customs

6 Commenting on the operation, Assistant Director-General of Customs, Mr Lee Boon Chong said that, “Though peddlers are caught, we also want to send a strong warning to buyers who have been patronising these peddlers that they too will not be spared. Once caught, buyers are fined heavily at \$500 per pack, or can even be charged in Court. Don’t suffer the same fate as these

peddlers, say no to illegal cigarettes.” He also added that the success of the operation would not have been possible without the close cooperation among the three enforcement agencies.

7 Since January 2009, 11 peddlers - all foreigners - had been arrested and 102 end-consumers fined in Yew Tee. More than 4,000 packets of contraband cigarettes had been seized in the area for the same period. In addition to its enforcement efforts, SC also recognises the important role that the public can play in the fight against illegal cigarettes activities. As part of its public education programme, SC has conducted about 50 outreach activities this year, including roadshows and other publicity drives in heartland areas, factories, schools, companies etc. During such outreach activities held in Yew Tee and its vicinity, over 6,500 posters and brochures were distributed to the residents, shops and factories in these areas.

8 Singapore Customs warns that buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with duty-unpaid goods are serious offences under the Customs and GST Acts. Offenders can be fined up to 20 times the amount of duty evaded and/or jailed for up to three years. The vehicles used in the commission of such offence are also liable to be forfeited. The public are strongly advised not to buy duty-unpaid products. For possessing a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers may face a minimum fine of \$500 or prosecution in court.

9 Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of duty or GST should contact the Singapore Customs Hotline at 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg.

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Illegal peddlers being rounded up by officers



Illegal peddlers caught will be charged in Court and faced stiff penalties including jail terms.