



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS AND IMMIGRATION & CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY

NEVER JUDGE A SOFA BY ITS COVER!

29,120 packets of contraband cigarettes hidden in sofa sets seized in joint operation

Never judge a sofa by its cover! A seemingly conventional and common looking consignment of 56 units of sofa was hidden with 29,120 packets of illegal cigarettes by smugglers who foolishly thought they could escape the eyes of the law by doing so. With the sharp-eyed Singapore Customs (SC) and Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officers around, there was no way they could hide.

2 On 23 June 2010, officers from SC and ICA mounted a joint operation on a targeted lorry driving in from Malaysia. The truck was trailed by SC officers before making a U-turn back towards the direction of Woodlands checkpoint. The driver finally came to a stop at the Woodlands Centre open car park. At this juncture, suspecting the lorry to contain illegal cigarettes, SC officers moved in and declared office. Officers proceeded to check the lorry and found ordinary sofa sets wrapped in plastic sheets. Undaunted, the officers checked further and discovered that the illegal cigarettes were carefully hidden within the base of the sofa seats, all hollowed-out to conceal the cigarettes. Upon questioning, it was found that the driver from Malaysia (male, 30 years old) had driven all the way from Kuala Lumpur into Singapore with the illegal goods.

3 The successful operation uncovered 52 cartons of cigarettes in each sofa. The 29,120 packets of cigarettes seized were estimated to be valued at about \$145,600, in which the duty and GST involved amounted to \$223,554. The Malaysian-registered lorry used for the conveyance of the contraband cigarettes was also seized while the driver was arrested and subsequently charged on 24 June 2010. He has been sentenced to serve 2½ years' imprisonment at the Subordinate Courts today.

4 SC 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. Vehicles used in the commission of such offences are also liable to be forfeited. The public is strongly advised not to buy duty-unpaid cigarettes. For possessing a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers may face a minimum fine of \$500 or prosecution in court.

[Please see case photographs in Appendix 1.]

5 As Singapore's first line of defence against terrorist threats, ICA has a duty to ensure the security and safety of Singapore. ICA has tightened security checks on passengers and vehicles at the checkpoints to prevent attempts to smuggle in undesirable persons, drugs, weapons, explosives and other contraband. ICA would like to advise the public against smuggling unlawful goods into Singapore.

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

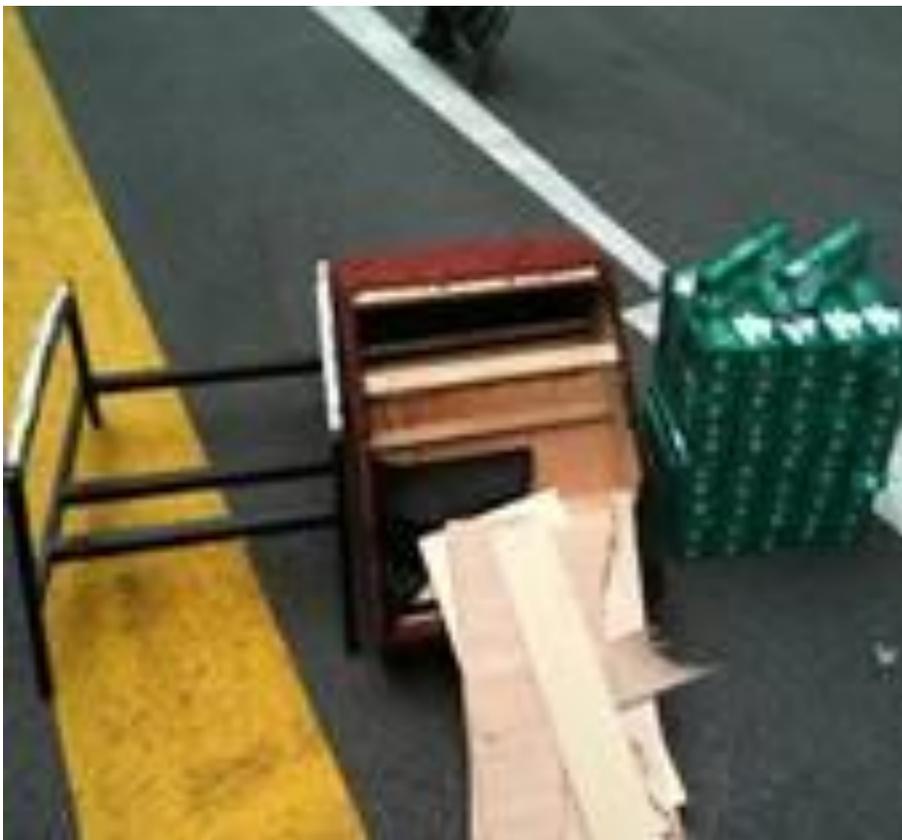
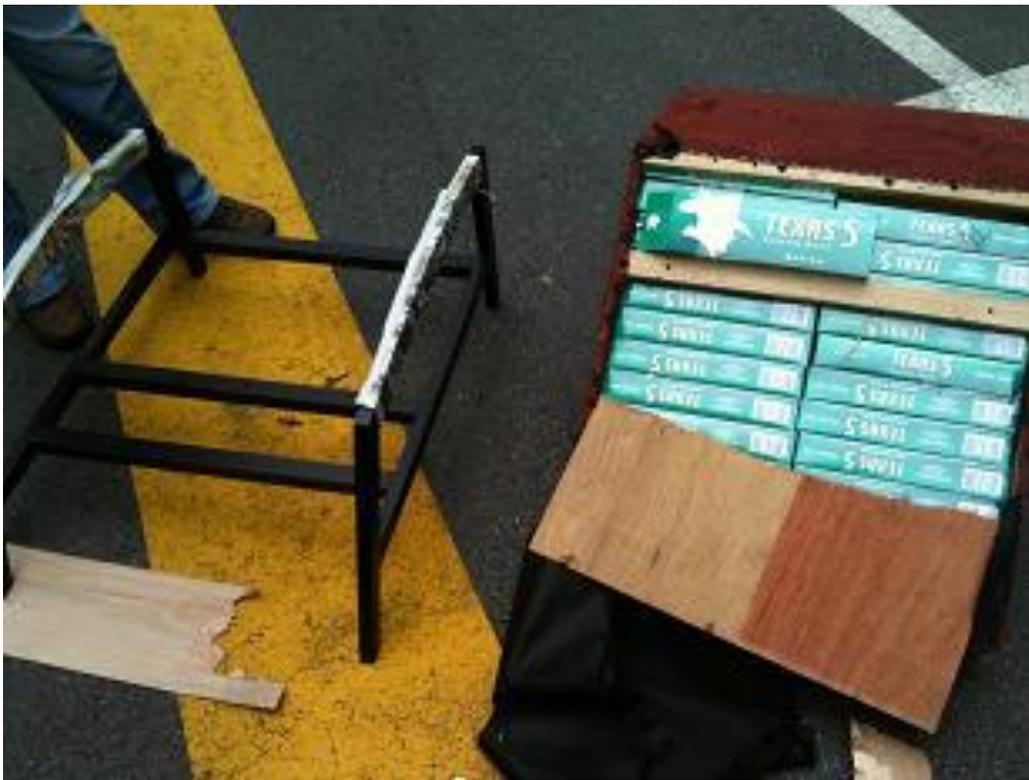
ISSUED BY: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS 新加坡关税局
KASTAM SINGAPURA சிங்கப்பூர் சுங்கத்துறை

IMMIGRATION & CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY 移民与关卡局

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Each sofa was wrapped in plastic sheet to avoid detection by officers



The base of the seats were hollowed out to contain contraband cigarettes