

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

LARGEST HAUL OF CONTRABAND CIGARETTES DETECTED AT WOODLANDS CHECKPOINT

A joint operation between Singapore Customs and the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) yielded the largest haul of contraband cigarettes detected at Woodlands Checkpoint this year. On 16 September 2005, Singapore Customs and ICA mounted an early morning operation at Woodlands Checkpoint. The operation was initiated by Singapore Customs based on risk profiling and information gathered from past investigations.

At about 8.15 am, our officers spotted the targeted Malaysian-registered bonded truck arriving at the checkpoint. When questioned, the truck driver claimed that he was carrying a consignment of furniture and did not have any contraband hidden in his truck. ICA officers diverted the truck to the inspection bay for a thorough check. The truck driver, a male Indian Malaysian, aged 28, was instructed to unlock the cargo doors, and upon opening, officers saw two rows of wooden cupboards occupying the cargo space. The first two cupboards were filled with small boxes of knocked-down storage units. Upon further searching, officers found 5,250 cartons of assorted brands of cigarettes hidden in the rest of the cupboards. The cartons contained 1.05 million sticks of cigarettes.

The driver was immediately arrested and the cigarettes seized. He admitted that he has been working for a Malaysian cigarette smuggling syndicate and was paid \$200 for the delivery.

The estimated market value of the contraband cigarettes is \$577,500, and the total duty and GST payable is \$393,225. The case is being investigated by Customs Special Investigation Branch. The offender is likely to be charged in court tomorrow. If found guilty, he can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount of tax evaded and/or imprisonment.

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

Singapore Customs takes a serious view of any attempt to evade duty and tax. Upon conviction by the court, first time offenders can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount of tax evaded. For 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.

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

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