



THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Ivory, copper and illegal cigarettes seized

As law enforcement officials step up their efforts to prevent smuggling of cigarettes, smugglers are finding more innovative ways of bringing in illegal goods into the country. The seizure of illegal cigarettes at the Groblersbrug border post early February saw law enforcement officials getting more than they bargained for, with ivory and copper discovered amongst concealed consignments of illegal cigarettes...

Illegal cigarettes with a street value of almost R3-million, ivory worth R 3.5million and an unknown quantity of copper were amongst the smuggled goods recovered by law enforcement authorities in two separate incidents on the border between South Africa and Botswana on 7 and 8 February 2013.

In a joint operation between authorities from the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African Revenue Service (SARS), 702 cartons of non-compliant "Remington Gold" cigarettes, 8.5kg of ivory and an unknown quantity of copper were seized from a truck trying to cross the Groblersbrug border post into South Africa on 7 February 2013. Authorities discovered the undeclared items concealed in false compartments in the truck's door panels, diesel tank as well as under the driver's seat. The truck and its contents were detained in the process and two suspects, one a Zimbabwean citizen, were arrested. The case has been remanded to 25 February 2013 for a formal bail application in Mokopane.

The following day, more than 2 million 'Sevilles' cigarettes were seized from a coal tanker trying to cross the Groblersbrug border post into South Africa. The truck was stopped and searched by SARS and SAPS officials and the coal was off-loaded. False floors were found in both the trailer bins and, upon further inspection, officials discovered the illegal cigarettes hidden in the compartments. The cigarettes were not compliant with the Tobacco Products Control Act as well as with the Customs and Excise Act. Both the driver and passenger were arrested.

Trafficking in South Africa has become an increasing problem over the past few years, especially with goods such as cigarettes, textiles, minerals, rhino horn and ivory being smuggled in and out of the country almost on a daily basis, with a detrimental impact on the economy.

The illegal trade in cigarettes alone has cost the government more than R5-billion last year (2012) according to Francois van der Merwe, CEO of the Tobacco Institute of Southern Africa (TISA). “Over the past three years, research indicates that illicit trade has grown from 21% in 2010 to 30% in 2012 cumulatively costing the government R12 billion. This has a direct impact not only on South Africa but also the revenue-sharing SACU member states – Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland.”

Industry research conducted by independent agencies shows that the illicit trade in cigarettes now accounts for 30% of the total cigarette market in South Africa, with approximately 55% of illegal tobacco products reaching South Africa from Zimbabwe. More than 30% is manufactured locally and the rest originates from Botswana and Middle Eastern countries.

“Law enforcement officials are to be commended for their ongoing efforts to curb the illegal trade in cigarettes. We believe that there should be increased resource allocation to enable greater law enforcement on the borders, within the country where illicit trading is increasing as well as dedicated investigation teams. Furthermore, a co-ordinated approach involving SACU and SADC law enforcement authorities is needed to really eliminate the illicit trade in cigarettes. TISA remains committed to working with all the relevant parties in efforts to eradicate the illegal trade in tobacco products,” Van der Merwe concluded.

Ends

Notes for the Editor:

Case 1 (702 Cartons of non-compliant Remington Gold Cigarettes, 8.5 Kg Ivory and unknown quantity of Copper) - 7 February 2013

- Vehicle: White Nissan 8 Ton Truck
- SAPS Station: Tom Burke
- Case Number: CAS 14/02/2013

Case 2 (11,000 Cartons of non-compliant Sevilles cigarettes) – 8 February 2013

- Case Number: CAS 15/02/2013

- Case remanded to 26 February 2013 for further investigation
- Both the accused have been released on bail

Media Enquiries may be referred to:

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