



THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Cigarette smugglers nabbed

Illegal cigarettes to the value of over R550,000 were seized by SARS and SAPS officials at the Kopfontein border post on 18 February. The cigarettes were being smuggled into South Africa from Botswana.

Authorities inspected two trucks trying to cross the border into South Africa, discovering over 2200 cartons of non-compliant “Remington Gold”, “Pacific” and “Sevilles” cigarettes in false compartments in the back of one of the vehicles. The cigarettes were non-compliant with the Tobacco Products Control Act as well as with the Customs and Excise Act. Upon interrogation, the driver of the truck with the illegal cigarettes pointed out that the other truck was being used as an escort vehicle. Both drivers were arrested, with the trucks and illegal cigarettes being detained to the state warehouse.

The illegal trade in cigarettes has become a serious problem, costing 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 the illicit trade in cigarettes 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 as well as to establish 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,” concludes Van der Merwe.

Ends

Notes for the Editor

- White Mitsubishi CANTER Truck Reg: B685 AMG
- Bronze Mercedes C200 Reg: BW 78 VC GP (Escort Vehicle) (The Mercedes is still under investigation by the SAPS and will be detained at the SAPS Zeerust)
- The two suspects will be detained at SAPS Nietverdiend.
- The Truck will be detained at Kopfontein Border post State Warehouse:
PD 18/01/2013.
- The cigarettes will be detained at Kopfontein Border post State Warehouse:
SG 18/02/2013.

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