

15 Lakh seized cigarettes worth Rs 1 crore to go up in smoke!

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AHMEDABAD: A massive stock of 15 lakh cigarette sticks worth at least Rs 1 crore seized at Kandla port five years ago will soon go up in smokes! After struggling to get the 'fit for smoking' certificate that is mandatory to auction the seized stock, the customs department has been left with no choice but to undertake the cumbersome process to destroy these illegally imported cigarettes. Surprisingly, the customs department kept sitting on this pile that was seized by the DRI in 2011-2012.



Moreover, the importer of this stock also refused to take back the stock saying it had over-lived its shelf life and had no market value. This was after the DRI permitted the customs commissioner in Kandla on November 22, 2012, to consider the provisional release of the stock. Also, it was only after three years that the department got a no-objection certificate from DRI to auction the cigarettes. It was only after several reminders that on March 10, 2016, the DRI gave the go-ahead to dispose the cigarettes.

The lethargic approach of the agencies in dealing with such perishable goods was exposed in the report of Director General of Inspections, customs, central tax, western regional unit, Mumbai. According to the draft disposal manual issued by the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC), the 'fit for smoking' certificate is mandatory before disposal of the confiscated cigarettes.

In July 2016, the customs department first approached the port health officer of Kandla to issue the certificate. However, the officer refused to certify saying that there is no provision of "Fit for Consumption/Disposal" certificate for tobacco products under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003. The department then approached Ahmedabad-based Gujarat Laboratory, which also refused to undertake the testing.

"We have no choice but to destroy the stock. The tobacco is emptied from each stick and then the stock is burnt. There is a detailed government of India guideline to destroy tobacco products," said a senior customs department official.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/15-lakh-seized-cigarettes-worth-rs-1-crore-to-go-up-in-smoke/articleshow/60964775.cms>