

Pune customs seize fake cigarettes worth ₹35 lakh, crackdown continues

Last week's seizure is part of the department's efforts to identify and act against the circulation of counterfeit tobacco products

Dheeraj Bengrut | Oct 10, 2026

The Pune customs department last week seized counterfeit cigarettes worth around ₹35 lakh after conducting searches at seven to eight locations across Pimpri-Chinchwad, with the investigation still underway. The seizure comes amid concerns over the smuggling of foreign-made cigarettes, counterfeit tobacco products and illegal e-cigarettes that contribute to tax evasion, loss of government revenue, and potential health risks.



On Thursday, October 8, the department organised a training session for its officers, with experts from ITC Limited explaining how to identify fake cigarettes from the genuine ones using security features. (HT PHOTO)

Thereafter on Thursday, October 8, the department even organised a training session for its officers, with experts from ITC Limited explaining how to identify fake cigarettes from the genuine ones using security features. Customs officials said that the illegal trade involves both smuggled imported cigarettes and counterfeit versions of domestic brands, often sold without paying the applicable taxes and duties, resulting in loss of revenue and violation of intellectual property rights.

Elaborating on this trend, Dhiraj More, deputy commissioner of Pune customs, said, "When cigarettes are sold without paying the applicable taxes and duties, the margins for those involved in the trade can be substantial. This encourages the circulation of smuggled and counterfeit cigarettes. We are dealing with two types of violations: foreign-made cigarettes being smuggled into India and counterfeit versions of domestic brands being manufactured or sold in the market."

Explaining the financial implications, More said, "When counterfeit cigarettes are sold without payment of applicable taxes, the government loses revenue that should have come through the goods and services tax (GST) and central excise duty. In case of imported cigarettes, there are also losses in customs duty and other applicable taxes. Apart from the economic impact, counterfeit products violate intellectual property rights because they imitate established brand names and trademarks without authorisation."

Last week's seizure is part of the department's efforts to identify and act against the circulation of counterfeit tobacco products. "Last week, we conducted searches at seven to eight locations across Pimpri-Chinchwad and seized cigarettes worth approximately ₹35 lakh. The investigation is ongoing," More said and added that counterfeit cigarettes could be of substandard quality, raising further concerns about the nature of products entering the market.

The training session held on Thursday focused on distinguishing between counterfeit and genuine cigarettes. The session aimed to improve the officers' ability to identify suspected fake products and understand methods used to imitate established brands.

Furthermore, More pointed to violations involving imported cigarettes that do not meet Indian packaging requirements. Under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), cigarette packages must carry prescribed health warnings covering 85% of both principal display areas. "Imported cigarettes that do not carry the mandatory health warnings in the prescribed format and language do not comply with Indian requirements. These warnings are compulsory and products that fail to meet the applicable regulations can face enforcement action," he said.

Additional commissioner of Pune customs Shivkumar Salunkhe urged citizens to help the department identify illegal cigarette sales. "If citizens come across shops selling smuggled cigarettes or cigarettes that do not carry the mandatory health warnings, they can share this information with the customs department. Such information can help us identify violations and take appropriate action," he said.

Salunkhe also warned against the sale and use of e-cigarettes and vaping devices, which are prohibited under Indian law. "The manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage and advertising of e-cigarettes is prohibited in India. If people come across such products being sold or used in Pune, they should inform the authorities. Even an individual instance can be reported, and citizens should not hesitate to share information with the department," he said.

Customs officials said that passengers are generally permitted to bring up to 200 cigarette sticks into India, subject to applicable baggage rules. Quantities exceeding the permissible limit may be seized and destroyed. More said some passengers violate these restrictions because they are unaware of the rules, while other cases may involve deliberate attempts to bring prohibited or undeclared goods into the country. Under applicable law, the import of prohibited goods valued at more than ₹50 lakh can attract arrest provisions.

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