

Seized foreign cigarette stocks pose headache for Customs

The steep rise in the seizure of smuggled foreign branded cigarettes from the states' major airports has put the Customs Department in a fix.

Published: 21st April 2019 | Toby Antony | Express News Service

KOCHI: The steep rise in the seizure of smuggled foreign branded cigarettes from the states' major airports has put the Customs Department in a fix. For the department is having a hard time storing the seized cigarette stocks at its warehouses in the state.

The Customs' warehouses even stock cigarette sticks seized around 10 years ago. Authorities are on the search for options to dispose of the seized cigarettes, which are eating up a major space at the warehouses.

As per the data with the Customs Department, around 65 lakh foreign cigarettes were seized at the state's airports in the last two fiscals.

While 45.07 lakh smuggled cigarettes were seized in 2018-19, as many as 19.60 lakh sticks were recovered in the previous year. "The major issue is that we cannot burn these cigarettes or dispose of by burying in pits as these options will lead to environmental problems. We had also explored an option to sell back these cigarettes to manufacturing companies abroad. However, the plan did not work out," an officer said.

Customs Commissioner Sumit Kumar said the department is looking for proposals from private companies that process waste. "We will soon invite a tender in this regard. Almost all warehouses under various formations of Customs in Kerala are finding it hard to stock the seized cigarettes," he said.



While handing over the seized cigarette stocks to private companies, it has to be ensured that they are properly treated. A Kozhikode-based company has approached the Customs Department with a proposal to treat the cigarettes.

“The company has assured us that the tobacco from the cigarettes will be separated and buds will be processed. The tobacco will be returned to the Customs agency and it can be sold to tobacco manufacturing companies,” said an officer.

It is estimated that smuggling of foreign cigarettes causes over `10,000-crore loss to the government exchequer annually. Apart from duty evasion, the smuggled cigarette packets don't have pictorial health warning mandatory under the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules, 2008.

“The majority of foreign cigarette seizure incidents are detected at airports. However, land border and seaports are more vulnerable compared to airports. Last year, DRI Chennai had intercepted a container shipped through Kattupalli port, which had 30.20 lakh cigarette sticks worth over `4 crores. Detecting cigarettes concealed inside imported goods in containers is an uphill task,” the officer said.

Source: <http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/kochi/2019/apr/21/seized-foreign-cigarette-stocks-pose-headache-for-customs-1966978.html>