

Report to the Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee

14 February 2019

Local Government Association warning that illegal tobacco trade harming efforts to cut smoking

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Purpose of the report

On the 26 January 2019 the Local Government Association (LGA) made the announcement that millions of cheap, illegal cigarettes are flooding the market with criminals selling them on Facebook and rogue traders using sophisticated secret places to store them.

1. The LGA stated that the illegal tobacco trade is rife and undermining efforts to reduce smoking and it is calling for courts to impose bigger fines for selling illegal cigarettes which cost the UK economy more than £2 billion a year in unpaid duty.
2. Fake or counterfeit cigarettes are made to look like popular UK brands but typically have foreign health warnings and no picture health warnings, while non-duty paid, or bootlegged cigarettes, are UK brands usually brought into the country from abroad and sold illegally.
3. Recent Council hauls, including some in the north east, have seen sniffer dogs used to trace and remove bootlegged and counterfeit tobacco from the streets as they continue to crack down on the illegal trade.
4. In the north east, these operations have been supported by the intelligence received from the "Keep it out Campaign" formulated and delivered by Fresh Smoke Free North East.
5. In recent seizures, stashes of illegal cigarettes and tobacco have been found hidden in sophisticated hiding places in the walls and floors of shops and secret panels in cupboards which are operated electronically.
6. Trading standards officers have previously found illegal hauls hidden in toilet cisterns, in boxes of sweets, behind extractor fans and ceiling lights.
7. Fake cigarettes pose a greater fire risk as they do not include designs that ensure that a lit cigarette will self-extinguish if not actively smoked. This reduces the chances of them starting a fire if they are left burning in an ashtray, are dropped or if the smoker falls asleep.

8. As Members will be aware, the testing of cigarettes to ensure that every cigarette sold in the EU meets a reduced ignition propensity (RIP) requirement by having ultra-thin bands of slightly thicker fire-retardant paper at intervals down the length of the cigarette so that, once lit, it will self-extinguish if not actively smoked; Is one of the services offered by the Metrology Laboratory.
9. Councillor Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said:
 - *"The sale of cheap, illegal tobacco by rogue traders in shops, private homes and through social media is funding organised criminal gangs and damaging legitimate traders, as well as making it easier for young people to get hooked on smoking, which undermines councils' efforts to help people quit.*
 - *"Counterfeit cigarettes also fail to extinguish themselves when left to burn, presenting a real danger to people.*
 - *"Bigger fines need to be imposed by the courts to deter the sale of illegal tobacco to help councils' enforcement work against rogue traders, reduce crime in our communities and protect the health of children and young people".*



Recommendation

10. The Committee is asked to note the information.

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