

Article 1 – Four Newport shops closed for selling illegal tobacco

FOUR Newport shops have been shut down for three months after being found to be involved in the sale of illegal tobacco.

The shops received three-month anti-social behaviour closure orders issued by Gwent Magistrates in August.

Superstore (141 Commercial Street), Jacob's Grocery Store (61 Commercial Street), Maleek Mini Market (61 Commercial Road), and Food Store (155 Commercial Road) will all be closed until November.

Food Store had contested the closure order but was unsuccessful.

These closures come off the back of twelve shops in the city being issued with closure orders after trading standards officers caught them selling illegal tobacco in the first three months of 2022.

It was estimated at the time that the closures will have prevented around £375,000 in illegal tobacco sales. Following the latest closures, that figure has now risen to more than £500,000, Newport Council has said.

A survey by the non-profit group Action on Smoking and Health Wales (ASH Wales) found that the illegal tobacco market makes up 15 per cent of all tobacco sales in Wales, with a higher prevalence in deprived communities.



“Illegal tobacco has been known to have links with serious organised crime,” read an ASH Wales statement. “Selling illegal tobacco may initially seem straight-forward, but if you look past the sellers and look further up the production chain, there is scope to fund serious criminal activity.

“Illegal tobacco sales have been known to fund drug operations and even human trafficking.

“It’s a gateway for children. Sellers often target children by selling cigarettes individually and/or at cheap prices.

“Finally, cheap prices and the lack of health warnings do not help smokers to quit.”

The investigations into these latest closures were led by the council’s trading standards team supported by Gwent Police, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, ASH Wales, South Wales Fire and Rescue, Newport NOW, HM Customs and Excise, representatives from the tobacco industry and officers from Operation CeCe, a specialist trading standards team tackling illegal tobacco.

“All tobacco is harmful, but illegal tobacco makes it easier for children to start smoking. Sellers rarely care who they sell to and can play a big part in starting a life-long addiction.”

South Wales Argus September 20th

Article 2 – Crackdown on Illegal tobacco trade in Wrexham

SIGNIFICANT quantities of illegal tobacco have been seized by Trading Standards Officers supported by North Wales Police from various locations across Wrexham.

Speaking in the wake of the operation, Trading Standards and Licensing Lead, Roger Mapleson of Wrexham's Public Protection Service said: "Illegal tobacco is a threat because its low cost and availability make it easy for children to obtain cigarettes and risk a life-long addiction to tobacco and it makes it harder for existing smokers to quit.



"Illegal tobacco sellers don't care who they sell to and non-smoking children are a lucrative target."

In the UK and Wales, smoking is the single biggest cause of premature deaths with about 5,500 people passing away each year with many more long-term illnesses and disabilities coming because of the habit.

Whilst smoking rates in Wales and the rest of the UK have been steadily declining over recent years, about 30 children start smoking every day in Wales. Mr Mapleson added: "At least 1 in 3 young people who experiment with smoking end up with a long-term addiction. Most adult smokers want to quit, but easy to obtain cheap fags is a difficult temptation to resist given the highly addictive nature of tobacco.

"We need the help of the local community to tackle illegal tobacco and drive it out of local communities. It is supplied as part of an organised criminal activity that is linked to other criminal activity including the supply of illegal drugs, smuggling and modern slavery"

Operation Cece follows previous raids over the last 18 months to target the supply of the banned tobacco in the community with the intention of seizing the products, disrupting the market followed by appropriate legal action to apprehend dealers.

Cllr Terry Evans, lead member for planning and public protection, said: "If you see, or know of cheap tobacco being sold in shops, from private houses, in pubs or the workplace or through social media please help protect our communities and report it.

The Leader, September

Article 3 – Sniffer dogs find tobacco stashed in secret ceiling compartment and shop chiller in 140,000 illegal cigarettes scam

Specialist tobacco sniffer dogs were used to locate secret hiding places being used by food shop bosses to conceal a huge haul of illegal and counterfeit cigarettes.



Investigators uncovered a large-scale illegal tobacco operation being run from a food shop, a court has heard.

Specialist sniffer dogs helped to locate secret storage compartments in the store and in total some 140,000 illegal and counterfeit cigarettes were recovered along with 20kg of rolling tobacco. The couple running the shop continued with the scam even after a series of raids by trading standards and revenue officers.

The man behind the operation, Jamal Karimi, has been jailed for 38 months – but his partner Simona Adamova is currently out of the country and living in the Czech Republic and it is not known when she will return.



Swansea Crown Court - The Stokrotka

Polish food shop in Swansea city centre was at the centre of **"significant trade in illegal tobacco"**.

Lee Reynolds, prosecuting, said in a series of raids by Swansea council trading standards officers and officers from HM Revenue and Customs carried out over almost 12 months large quantities of illegal cigarettes and tobacco were seized both from the Mansel Street shop and from vehicles parked outside it. The cigarettes were either "illicit whites" – cigarettes with no branding – or counterfeit versions of well-known brands.

He said on a number of occasions specialist sniffer dogs were used in the searches and they helped to uncover a number of concealed storage areas in the shop including one in a chiller cabinet and one in the ceiling void in the toilets – the latter of which had its own electrically-operated lift for accessing the clandestine goods.

The court heard 44-year-old Karimi was present during a number of the searches but gave false names to investigators when interviewed and denied any knowledge of the hidden compartments. On one occasion the officers found a large quantity of tobacco in a Range Rover parked near the shop. The defendant denied the vehicle was his even though CCTV footage from that morning showed him driving it.

Resource 11c. Article 3

Officers also carried out a search of his house in the Townhill area of Swansea and recovered more illegal tobacco products – 27,000 cigarettes and 5kg of tobacco stored in suitcases – along with £2,755 in cash. The defendant denied the items were his and said he was only storing them for a Polish friend in return for £40. He also denied he had previously given false names.

Mr Reynolds said that in total some 140,000 illegal cigarettes and 20kg of rolling tobacco were seized and it was clear the trade in illegal tobacco had continued even while the shop and its owners was being investigated. The barrister the value of the seized products had been put at £176,000 but there was no way of putting a figure on how much money had been made over the months from similar products which had actually been sold. He said: "This was a lengthy and clear very profitable trade."

The recorder said he was satisfied that both Karimi and Adamova were involved but that the defendant currently before the court had been the one taking the lead. He said: "This was a determined attempt by you and your partner to make money. You were driven by greed."

Giving the defendant a 20% discount for his guilty plea, which was entered shortly before he was due to stand trial, the recorder sentenced him to 38 months in prison.

Karimi will serve up to half that period in custody before being released on licence under the UK government's early release scheme to serve the remainder in the community. Adamova, aged 43, has previously pleaded guilty to fraud and will be sentenced at a later date.



Wales Online, May

Cymru Ar-lein, Mai

Article 4 – Astonishing 99 million cigarettes seized in truck as Welshman is arrested

99 million cigarettes were discovered in the back of the lorry, which had been shipped via the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Border Force has revealed its officers found the biggest ever haul of illegal cigarettes into the UK after seizing a truck at the Port of Hull. According to the force, an astonishing 99 million cigarettes were discovered in the back of the lorry, which had been shipped via the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Hull Live has reported that the incident happened on June 1st but has only now been confirmed by HM Revenue and Customs. A 57-year-old man from south Wales was arrested in July in connection with the seizure and was released on bail, while another man from the Birmingham area has been interviewed under caution. Investigations are ongoing.



HMRC said the unpaid tax on the cigarettes was worth around £44m. Brands shown in pictures of the load included Marshall and Mayfair.

They said a Border Force tobacco detection dog helped uncover the illegal cigarettes, which were packed inside eight shipping containers. The load had been

described as 'birchwood logs' and shipped through the UAE on import documents.

Anthony Usher, Deputy Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“This is the single largest seizure of cigarettes ever made at a UK port – and our streets would have been flooded with them had they not been discovered.

“We are determined to stamp out tobacco fraud by working closely with partners in the UK and internationally to bring those responsible to justice.

“Cheap cigarettes come at a cost as they often fund organised crime and other illegal activity that causes real harm to our communities, such as drugs, guns and human trafficking.

Wales Online, October