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Ringleaders jailed for 12.5m cigarette smuggling attempt

Joseph Maguire, 56, from Belfast, and Gary Taggart, 31, from Omagh, were behind two failed attempts to smuggle 12.5 million non-duty paid cigarettes into the UK. The duty and VAT evaded on the haul is £2.5 million.

Maguire and Taggart organised the two failed attempts but were caught by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) criminal investigators. Two other members of the gang were also sentenced on Friday (19 April).

John Cooper, Assistant Director, HMRC said:

“Maguire and Taggart were at the heart of a calculated attempt to flood the UK with millions of illegally smuggled cigarettes. They thought that using false consignment information, a remote lock-up and 16 mobile phones would make their crime undetectable, but they were wrong.”

Boxes of cigarettes from the first 4.5 million consignment were already being loaded onto a hired van when HMRC officers arrived at Unit 7, Blackcroft Farm, near Reading on 10 February 2011. They arrested Thomas Troke, 31, of Iver, Bucks, and Clinton O’Connell, 55, from Reading. Taggart, the lorry driver who had brought the cigarettes into the UK in his trailer unit, had already left the scene.

The following day, Taggart was stopped by Border Force officers at Dover. A search of his trailer revealed that his load, described as ‘foodstuffs’, was in fact eight million smuggled cigarettes, and he was arrested. Further investigations by HMRC led them to Maguire. He was arrested on 1 August 2011 as he arrived at Stansted Airport on a flight from Belfast.

Maguire and Taggart denied smuggling 12.5 million cigarettes in two separate consignments but were found guilty after a trial at Reading Crown Court. Troke and O’Connell had pleaded guilty to their involvement in the first, 4.5 million smuggling attempt.

All returned to Reading Crown Court for sentencing on Friday (19 April). Maguire was sentenced to five years imprisonment and Taggart to three years in prison. O’Connell was imprisoned for 21 months and Troke was jailed for 15 months.

Anyone with information about cigarette and tobacco smuggling can contact the Customs Hotline by telephoning 0800 59 5000, or by sending an email to customs.hotline@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk.

Notes to Editors

1. Defendants’ details:

- Joseph Maguire, DOB 27/01/57, of Colinmill, Dunmurry, Belfast. Maguire is transport manager for his own freight agency NKDN Transport.

- Gary Thomas Taggart, DOB 24/06/83, of Tamlaght Road, Omagh, is a lorry driver.
- Clinton Patrick O'Connell, DOB 12/09/57, of Henleywood Road, Reading is believed to sell fireworks.
- Thomas Troke, also known as James Honour, DOB 26/10/81, of Iver Court, High Street, Iver, Buckinghamshire, is also believed to sell fireworks.

2. Images are available on our Flickr channel: www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk

3. Follow HMRC on Twitter @HMRCgovuk

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HMRC is responsible for making sure that the money is available to fund the UK's public services and for helping families and individuals with targeted financial support.

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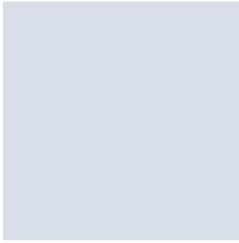
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