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 ***News Release***

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|  | For the attention of **News Desks**  | No of pages: 2  |  |
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**Three arrested in County Londonderry tobacco raids**

Three men have been arrested, and more than 750,000 cigarettes and 40 kilograms of hand rolling tobacco (HRT) seized by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

HMRC officers, accompanied by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, searched a number of domestic premises, outbuildings and vehicles in the South Derry area yesterday (Wednesday 14 September) where the suspected illicit tobacco products, worth an estimated £250,000 in lost duty and taxes, were found.

Steve Tracey, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

 “Tobacco fraudsters are costing the UK £2 billion a year in lost taxes. This is theft and money which should be going to fund public services is ending up in the pockets of crooks. Disrupting this illegal trade and levelling the playing field for legitimate local businesses who cannot compete with their criminal competitors, is at the heart of our strategy to clampdown on the illicit tobacco market.

“We encourage anyone with information about the illegal sale of tobacco or alcohol to contact the Customs Hotline on 0800 59 5000.”

Approximately £37,000 in cash, two cars, one van and two horse boxes were also seized during the operation. The three men were interviewed by HMRC and have been released on bail. Investigations into the suspected fraud are ongoing.

**Notes for Editors:**

1. Details of the arrests:

A 63 year-old man from south Derry and two men aged 69 and 24 from County Armagh were arrested.

5 residential properties in the south Derry area were searched as part of the operation.

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