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 ***News Release***

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**Haulage boss sentenced as tobacco scam busted at Dover**

A haulage company boss who was caught smuggling 2,000 kilos of hand-rolling tobacco into the UK, evading £442,360 in duty, has been jailed for 18 months after an investigation by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Border Force officers stopped a lorry after it arrived at the Port of Dover on 12 September 2018. Officers searched the trailer and found tobacco hidden in boxes marked ‘tents’. The driver, Attila Tanko, 44, from Hungary was arrested, the tobacco was seized and the matter referred to HMRC to investigate.

Tanko claimed he was ‘tapped up’ at a rest stop in Luxembourg by a man who asked him to deliver the tobacco in exchange for 2,000 euros.

Tom Hunnisett, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“Tanko was wrong to think he could get away with smuggling tobacco into the UK for his own financial gain. The illegal tobacco trade has a harmful effect on legitimate businesses and deprives us of money needed to fund our vital public services. The duty evaded on this illicit tobacco was equivalent to the salaries of 19 nurses in Kent for a year.

”HMRC works closely with Border Force to tackle and disrupt this illicit trade and I urge anyone who has information about the smuggling, selling or storing of illicit tobacco to report it online to HMRC, or contact our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

Paul Morgan, Director of Border Force South East and Europe said:

“This is just one example of the crucial work that Border Force officers do every day to help keep the UK safe and protect the economy. Detections such as this are testament to their dedication and expertise.

“We will continue to work with HMRC to bring those engaged in smuggling to justice.”

Tanko pleaded guilty on 13 September 2018 and on 17 December 2018, at Maidstone Crown Court, he was sentenced to 18 months in prison.

**Notes for Editors**

1. Attila Tanko, (DOB 15/09/1974) of Szigetszentmiklos, Hungary, and owner of the Chariots of Fire KFT haulage company, was sentenced to 18 months in prison on 17 December 2018 at Maidstone Crown Court.
2. He pleaded guilty to the fraudulent evasion of duty at Margate Magistrates Court on 13 September 2018.
3. Photographs of Tanko and the tobacco are available.
4. Anyone with information about people suspected of smuggling, selling or storing illegal tobacco should report it online at: <https://www.gov.uk/report-tobacco-or-alcohol-tax-evasion> or contact our hotline on 0800 788 887.
5. Fully qualified nurses start on salaries of £23,023 on Band 5 of the NHS Agenda for Change Pay Rates. Salaries in London attract a high-cost area supplement. <https://www.nhsemployers.org/tchandbook/annex-1-to-3/annex-2-pay-bands-and-pay-points-on-the-second-pay-spine-in-england>
6. Follow HMRC’s press office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice.

**Issued by HM Revenue and Customs Press Office**

**Press enquiries only please contact:**

Lucy Collins

Tel: 07900 394 601

Email: lucy.collins@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk

Out of hours

Tel: 07860 359 544

**Website** [www.gov.uk/hmrc](http://www.gov.uk/hmrc)