A revenue officer from Customs Service pictured with some of the 7.6 million contraband cigarettes with an estimated retail value of 2.9 million which where seized yesterday at Dublin Port. Pic:Mark Condren 24.9.2012

**Tom Brady Security Editor** – 31 December 2013

**CIGARETTE smugglers are using smaller shipments to evade detection by Customs officers at the ports.**

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The smugglers are bringing in consignments in vans and small trucks rather than relying on containers.

And the changing trends have also resulted in a greater role for 'ant smugglers' -- airline passengers who bring in a few hundred illicit cigarettes each without paying taxes.

Many of the ant smugglers arrive here on flights from eastern [Europe](http://searchtopics.independent.ie/topic/Europe) where the scam in illegal goods is being masterminded by organised crime gangs.

These gangs use a network of contacts to guarantee a supply of cigarettes that have been legitimately manufactured in the Far East and the [United Arab Emirates](http://searchtopics.independent.ie/topic/United_Arab_Emirates).

Customs officers confiscated 37.7 million cigarettes and 3,828kg of tobacco in the first 10 months of the year

But the smugglers are still enjoying a roaring trade, despite the seizures.

The last survey carried out for the Revenue and the HSE's national tobacco control office estimated that 13pc of smokers buy illegal packs of cigarettes.

However, manufacturers and retailers say their studies show the number is closer to 28pc.

A survey for cigarette-maker JTI Ireland showed that retail sales of tobacco products in the past 12 months totalled €44m in Donegal, €43m in Louth, €21m in Cavan and €16m in Monaghan.

The manufacturers and retailers claim €250m was lost in excise duties to the Exchequer in 2012 from tobacco smuggling, while retailers suffered an estimated €450m loss.

According to Retail Ireland, criminals generate profits of €3m a week from illegal tobacco sales.

There are fears that this trade will continue to grow as organised crime gangs switch to tobacco from drugs because it is less risky but still lucrative.