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ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN, DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE ANNOUNCE CHARGES IN CIGARETTE SCHEME

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan and the Illinois Department of Revenue today announced criminal charges against two Chicago area men for conspiring to purchase unstamped cigarettes to resell.

Ahmad Skeikh, 39, of Burbank, and Mazen Othman, 37, of Bridgeview, were arraigned today in Cook County Criminal Court and each charged with conspiracy to possess unstamped cigarettes, a Class 4 felony punishable by one to three years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

"When unstamped cigarettes are sold, everyone loses: State and local government get cheated out of significant tax revenues. Legitimate retailers lose sales, and the public health is comprised when these cheaper cigarettes get in the hands of teenagers," Attorney General Madigan said.

The charges were the result of a joint investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Illinois Department of Revenue's Bureau of Criminal Investigations, the Hickory Hills Police Department and Madigan's office.

"It is gratifying to see that the court takes these matters as seriously as we do," said Brian Hamer, Director of Revenue. "The tax system works best when everyone pays what they owe, and for that to happen, we need to make sure that violators of our tax laws are held accountable for their actions."

The defendants were arrested on March 13 after they arrived at a Hickory Hills warehouse with money to purchase more than 1,000 packages of unstamped cigarettes illegally.

Properly stamped cigarettes contain a tax stamp affixed to the bottom of each package. A carton of stamped cigarettes costs more than \$60 in Cook County and more than \$80 in Chicago. For each carton, 98 cents is paid in state taxes, \$2 in Cook County taxes and 68 cents in city of Chicago taxes.

Assistant Attorneys General James Rustik and Kristina Waldron are handling the cases for Madigan's Special Prosecutions Bureau.

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