

Footage of ivory smuggling tips in stores angers activists

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Seized ivory tusks are displayed by Hong Kong Customs officials on October 3, 2013

Activists called Thursday for an outright ban on ivory trading in Hong Kong after TV footage emerged showing assistants in local stores giving advice on how to smuggle the material overseas.

The footage secretly filmed by Britain's ITN showed salesmen advising

undercover reporters posing as customers how to take [ivory](#) artifacts past customs.

Ivory is "easy to take out, even if you go through the metal (detector) there's no sign," a salesman was shown as saying in some of the footage uploaded by the South China Morning Post newspaper.

A salesman with a red, apple-shaped piece of ivory told the undercover reporters that customs would believe it was plastic.

The undeclared import and export of ivory is illegal in Hong Kong, but shopkeepers are still allowed to trade ivory which dates back before a global ban went into force in 1989.

An animal rights group, Hong Kong for Elephants, said the footage showed the current ban on international ivory trading was insufficient to protect elephants.

The group said an estimated 50,000 elephants were illegally killed for their tusks in 2013, driven in large part by surging demand from China.

"The [footage](#) simply points to the fact that the [ivory trade](#) is rife with corruption and that the previous ban, which still allows for trade in old elephant ivory stocks, is insufficient to protect the species," said Sharon Kwok of the group in a statement.

She called for a complete [ban](#) on ivory trading in Hong Kong.

Another activist, Alex Hofford, said: "It is shameful that Hong Kong's two largest retailers of ivory should be openly advocating various smuggling techniques to potential consumers of ivory who visit their stores."

A manager of one of the stores which was secretly filmed, Leung Yun-bun of Yue Hwa, told AFP the staffer had breached company policy by offering tips to customers.

"Disciplinary action has been taken," he said.

Another company, Chinese Arts and Crafts, said the advice did not represent company policy and those who "misled" customers had been suspended.

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