



Retailers rally over bootleg tobacco

RETAILERS wrote off almost half-a-billion euro in lost sales last year because of cigarette smuggling, it was claimed yesterday.

Angry shop owners hit out at the Government, claiming not enough was being done to target criminals importing cheap tobacco to be sold at knock-down prices.

The 3,000-strong Retailers Against Smuggling (RAS) group said around 4,000 jobs could have been created in the sector last year had sales not been hit by the illegal trade.

Spokesman William Hanley said: "What we are asking the Government to do is to bring in penalties that will deter criminals from getting involved in smuggling.

"The Government needs to wake up to the fact that they're losing so much revenue."

The group said tobacco sales could account for around 40 per cent of retailers' incomes.

But, Mr Hanley said, smokers can buy a pack of 20 cigarettes on the streets for as little as €4 – compared with about €8.50 in shops.

Despite regular seizures by customs officials, RAS maintains that just one in every 10 smuggled batches are discovered.

RAS was set up last June, and its members range from corner shop-owners to large supermarket chains.