

Defendants in three cases of supplying unsafe surgical masks fined

Persons-in-charge of a clothing shop and a pharmacy as well as a pharmacy and its two directors were convicted and fined \$2,000 to \$50,000 today (March 31) at West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts, Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts and Fanling Magistrates' Courts for supplying unsafe surgical masks in contravention of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO).

In view of the developments of the COVID-19 epidemic, Customs has conducted a territory-wide operation codenamed "Guardian" since January 27 last year to conduct spot checks and enforcement operations on common protective items, and test-purchased the three types of surgical masks concerned. After investigation, Customs confirmed that the total bacterial counts of the surgical masks exceeded the maximum permitted limit by 0.25 to 5.5 times, which failed to comply with the general safety requirements of the CGSO. The retailers connected with the cases included two pharmacies and a clothing shop.

Customs reminds traders to comply with the requirements of the CGSO. Members of the public should observe the following tips when purchasing and using surgical masks:

- Check the trade descriptions of the surgical masks' packages during transactions;
- Check carefully before wearing the surgical masks and stop using the masks if they have stains or odd smells;
- Avoid buying or using loosely-packed surgical masks;
- Pay attention to the proper way of using surgical masks;
- Change surgical masks at a suitable time;
- Store surgical masks in dry places; and
- Purchase surgical masks at reputable retail shops.

Under the CGSO, it is an offence to supply, manufacture or import consumer goods unless the goods comply with the general safety requirements for consumer goods. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year on first conviction, and \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on subsequent conviction.

Customs attaches great importance to the trade descriptions and safety of surgical masks. The "Guardian" operation is ongoing to ensure that the surgical masks being sold in the market comply with the CGSO and the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO). Law enforcement action will be taken immediately if any suspected violations are detected.

Members of the public may report any suspected violations of the CGSO or the TDO to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-

reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).