

Hong Kong Customs arrests two former directors of suddenly closed online household product store

Hong Kong Customs arrested two former directors of an online household product store yesterday (April 24) on suspicion of engaging in wrongly accepting payments when selling products, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO).

The online household product store, operated by two companies, abruptly announced its closure earlier this month. As of 8am today (April 25), Customs had received a total of 451 complaints against the online store concerned. Complainants reported making prepaid orders for various household goods, including clothing, beauty products, health food and masks, but failing to receive the goods or obtain refunds from the shop. The total amount involved in the case is approximately \$400,000, with the largest individual case amounting to around \$20,000.

Customs officers took enforcement action yesterday and arrested a male former director from each of the two companies. The two former directors, aged 33 and 38, are currently released on bail pending further investigation.

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Customs has all along been concerned about illegal online sales activities. It has strived to combat unfair trade practices on websites to protect consumers' interests.

Under the TDO, any trader commits an offence if at the time of acceptance of payment, the trader intends not to supply the product or intends to supply a materially different product, or there are no reasonable grounds for believing that the trader will be able to supply the product within a specified or reasonable period. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment of five years.

Customs reminds traders to comply with the requirements of the TDO and refrain from engaging in unfair trade practices when supplying goods.

Consumers should stay vigilant in regard to online shopping. They should procure products at reputable shops and keep the transaction receipts and related records, which can become the basic information in case a complaint is lodged in the future. Moreover, customers could choose payment methods such as "cash on delivery" or "pay deposit first and then pay the balance" when ordering goods on the Internet.

Members of the public may report any suspected violations of the TDO to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form

(eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).