

Hong Kong Customs arrests woman suspected of engaging in unfair trade practices in sale of face masks online

Hong Kong Customs last Friday (April 22) arrested a woman suspected of engaging in wrongly accepting payment when selling face masks on the Internet, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO).

Customs earlier received information alleging that an online seller was suspected of engaging in unfair trade practices in the course of sale of face masks through a social media platform page. After investigation, Customs officers found that the brand name and the quantity of the face masks provided by the online seller were materially different from those of the orders placed by the customers after the seller received payments from them.

Customs officers subsequently conducted an operation last Friday and arrested a 29-year-old woman suspected to be in connection with the case.

An investigation is ongoing and the arrested woman has been released on bail pending further investigation.

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

Moreover, consumers are reminded to procure products at reputable shops and to get familiar with the market price ranges of the products. They should remain more alert to unusual prices offered by online traders when procuring products in order to avoid losses. Before making a transactional decision and settling the payment, consumers should also take note of whether a complete and valid business address as well as contact information are provided on the websites or social media platform pages so that follow-up action could be taken when encountering problems in the future.

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 for five years.

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).