

Hong Kong Customs combats illegal streaming of TV channels and infringing anime videos (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs conducted an enforcement operation yesterday (March 25) to combat infringement activities involving illegal communication of TV channels and infringing anime videos to the public by streaming technology. During the operation, Customs seized two TV decoders of pay TV channels, a TV signal receiver set, three sets of computer servers suspected to be used for illegal streaming, a computer used for remote server operation, a mobile phone and an assortment of electronic equipment and audio-visual devices with a total estimated market value of about \$40,000.

Customs earlier received information from a copyright owner alleging that someone had set up a web page to distribute copyright-protected pay-TV channels through streaming technology without the authorisation of the copyright owner. Customs officers then initiated an investigation and identified an individual, registered as a user of local pay TV channels, who utilised advanced digital technologies to bypass the digital rights protection measures enforced by copyright owners and communicate the pay-TV channels to the public. Furthermore, the user employed a specialised TV signal receiver and illegal streaming software hosted on the computer servers for the illegal communication of local free TV channels via webpages. The subject promoted this service as a "digital TV retransmission station" to attract Internet users. Additionally, it was discovered that the subject separately set up another website to offer a substantial collection of suspected infringing animated videos for on-demand streaming.

After a comprehensive investigation and with the assistance of the copyright owner, Customs yesterday raided a residential unit in Tsuen Wan. During a live broadcast of overseas basketball matches, Customs utilised computer forensic programmes to conduct real-time monitoring over related suspected illegal streaming activities and seized the batch of suspected illegal streaming servers and electronic equipment. Officers from the department's Computer Forensic Laboratory were also summoned to the scene to render support. Through on-site computer evidence collection, over 50 000 digital video files were seized from one of the computer servers, including suspected infringing animated series, movies and variety shows, which were believed to be used for illegal communication.

During the operation, a 26-year-old man was arrested for operating the websites for suspected infringement activities. He was released on bail pending further investigation. The investigation is ongoing.

Customs reminds the public not to engage in unauthorised activities involving the dissemination of copyrighted works. Members of public should also respect intellectual property rights and refrain from watching infringing movie/TV works or pay-TV channels through any form of illegal

streaming. Webpages, applications or streaming links related to illegal streaming may contain computer viruses or malicious programmes which can pose potential risks to users.

According to the Copyright Ordinance, it is illegal for anyone, without the authorisation of the copyright owner, to engage in any trade or business that involves communicating works to the public for profit or reward, or in the course of such trade or business, to communicate copyrighted works to the public; or to communicate copyrighted works to the public to an extent that damages the rights of the copyright owner. Upon conviction, the maximum penalty is imprisonment for four years and a fine of \$50,000 for each copyrighted work.

Members of the public may report any suspected infringement activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 182 8080 or its dedicated crime reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

