

Hong Kong Customs combats unfair trade practices at medicine shop

Hong Kong Customs today (September 5) arrested two salesmen of a medicine shop suspected to have applied a false trade description in the course of selling a proprietary medicine, and engaged in unfair trade practices involving a misleading omission in the course of selling Chinese medicines, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO).

A Customs officer this afternoon, disguised as customer, conducted a test-buy operation at a medicine shop in Tsim Sha Tsui. A salesman was suspected of making a false claim in the course of selling a medicine by saying that it was a particular brand of medicine. However, the officer later found that the medicine was not the brand specified by the salesman.

Separately, the same salesman, during the course of selling three types of Chinese medicines, was also suspected of providing untimely material information about the total price of the Chinese medicines. The total price of the medicines was revealed only after they were ground by another salesman, and that the price was almost eight times higher than what was expected. Customs officers subsequently arrested the two salesmen, aged 49 and 32 respectively.

An investigation is ongoing and the two arrested men have been released on bail pending further investigation.

Customs reminded traders to comply with the requirements of the TDO and consumers to purchase products from reputable shops. Consumers should also be cautious about the unit price and ask for more information, including the total price of the goods selected, before making a purchase decision.

Under the TDO, any person who in the course of any trade or business applies a false trade description to any goods commits an offence. Any trader who engages in a commercial practice that omits or hides material information or provides material information in a manner that is unclear, unintelligible, ambiguous or untimely, and as a result causes, or is likely to cause, an average consumer to make a transactional decision, commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction of two offences is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Moreover, Customs has established the Quick Response Team to handle urgent complaints lodged by short-haul visitors in contravention of the TDO. To address the pressing needs of tourists, complaints will be promptly referred and handled with priority.

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/).