Hong Kong Customs combats unfair trade practices at online shop

Hong Kong Customs on April 14 arrested a man suspected of engaging in wrongly accepting payments when selling luxury handbags on the Internet, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO).

Customs earlier received a number of reports alleging that an online shop owner sold luxury handbags through an online shop but failed to supply the ordered goods within the specified date or a reasonable period after accepting payments from customers. Also, no refund was offered.

After investigation, Customs officers arrested a 25-year-old man suspected to be connected with the case. He is the registered owner of the aforementioned online shop.

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

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

Customs reminds traders to comply with the requirements of the TDO. Under the TDO, any trader commits an offence if at the time of payment acceptance, 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.

Customs appeals to consumers that they should stay vigilant in regard to online shopping and procure products at reputable shops. Consumers should also beware of whether the online payment methods provided by the online stores are secure, and keep the transaction receipts and related documents, which can become basic information in case a complaint is lodged in the future.

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).