

Hong Kong Customs combats unfair trade practices by fitness centre

Hong Kong Customs today (October 15) arrested two directors and two staff members of a fitness centre suspected of engaging in aggressive commercial practices in the course of selling fitness services, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO).

Customs officers earlier received information that staff members of a fitness centre in Wan Chai requested five customers to fill in their personal particulars on a tablet for a questionnaire and sign on it for record purposes. After the customers signed the e-form, the staff members immediately revealed that it was actually a fitness services contract and forced them to settle the payment. The staff members were suspected of imposing undue influence and using aggressive commercial practices when selling fitness services to the customers, forcing them to procure the fitness services.

After investigation, Customs officers today arrested four men whose ages range between 23 and 39. Investigation is ongoing.

Customs reminds traders to comply with the requirements of the TDO and consumers to procure services at reputable shops. Before making any purchase decision, consumers should be cautious in providing their identity cards or credit cards to a salesperson. Consumers should firmly refuse to sign any documents if they do not clearly know the content and price of the service to be provided, or have no intention to purchase the service.

Under the TDO, any trader commits an offence of engaging in aggressive commercial practices if harassment, coercion or undue influence is used to impair a consumer's freedom of choice or conduct, causing the consumer to make a transactional decision. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Stressing its priority given to consumer rights protection and zero tolerance for unfair trade practices by fitness centres, Customs pledges that it will continue its stringent enforcement action against unscrupulous traders.

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).