

# Hong Kong Customs combats unfair trade practices in sale of face masks online

Hong Kong Customs on May 6 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 different social media platform pages. After investigation, Customs officers found that the brand name and quantity of the goods 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 (May 6) 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.

When making online purchases, consumers should pay attention to the goodwill of the online companies or merchants and beware of the possible leakage of personal information. In addition, 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. Consumers are also reminded to contact trademark owners or traders for enquiries in case of doubts.

Customs has all along been concerned with illegal online sales activities. It has strived to combat unfair trade practices on websites. Customs reminds consumers that they should stay vigilant in regard to online shopping, and procure products at reputable shops. They should not purchase items of unknown sources and unusual prices offered at suspicious websites or social media platforms to prevent any losses that may be incurred.

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](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)).