

Hong Kong Customs detects largest-ever counterfeit face mask case (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a special operation against counterfeit face masks on October 28 and seized about 100 000 suspected counterfeit medical-grade face masks intended to be transshipped overseas via Hong Kong, with an estimated market value of about \$3 million. One person was arrested. This is the largest-ever suspected counterfeit face mask case detected by Customs in terms of both quantity and seizure value.

Customs earlier received information alleging that a company was suspected of selling counterfeit face masks. After an investigation with the assistance of the trademark owner, Customs took enforcement action on the above-mentioned date and first seized the batch of suspected counterfeit medical-grade face masks at a storehouse in Yuen Long.

Customs further raided a trading company in connection with the case in San Po Kong and a residential premises in Kowloon City on the same day. A 71-year-old male person-in-charge of the trading company was arrested.

Initial investigations revealed that unscrupulous merchants intended to transship the batch of masks overseas for sale and profit. Customs is looking into the source of the face masks involved in the case. Samples have also been sent to a laboratory for safety testing.

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

Customs will continue to take stringent enforcement action and maintain close contact with trademark owners in monitoring the market situation with a view to proactively combating counterfeit protective items.

Under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO), any person who sells or possesses for sale any goods with a forged trade mark commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Customs has conducted a territory-wide special operation codenamed "Guardian" since January 27 this year to conduct spot checks and enforcement operations on common protective items. More than 6 000 officers have been mobilised to conduct over 38 000 inspections at retail spots. Investigations have been conducted against 17 cases of suspected violations of the TDO and 13 cases of suspected violations of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO). Eighty persons have been arrested so far and goods suspected of violating the law including nearly 6 million surgical masks, 314 bottles of disinfectant alcohol and 23 bottles of normal saline have been seized.

The "Guardian" operation will continue and Customs will carry on its high-profile law enforcement to combat and prevent violation of relevant ordinances.

Members of the public may report any suspected violation of the TD0 or the CGS0 to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

