

Hong Kong Customs investigates suspected case of supplying surgical masks with false trade descriptions to GLD (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (September 1) mounted an operation in connection with a case in which surgical masks suspected of bearing a false origin claim were supplied to the Government Logistics Department (GLD). A supplier involved in the case and the director of a logistics company were arrested for contravening the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO). According to the information provided by the GLD, the 32 million masks involved in the case are being kept in the GLD's stock and have not been allocated to any government departments for use. Customs will maintain close ties with the GLD to seize the masks involved for further investigation.

The GLD had earlier procured the surgical masks involved from the local trading supplier involved in the case, who claimed the masks it supplied originated from Japan. However, the department later suspected that not all of the masks originated from Japan and therefore lodged a complaint to Customs on August 31.

Customs immediately launched an investigation and discovered that the surgical masks involved were supplied to the GLD by a local trading company through a logistics company. The surgical masks were packed in paper boxes or plastic bags with 50 pieces in each box or bag. The information of a Japanese manufacturer was provided on the packaging and the place of origin shown was Japan. Preliminary investigation revealed that most of the surgical masks were not manufactured in Japan, which was different from what had been declared.

Customs officers then mounted an operation yesterday and searched two offices of the trading company involved in Cheung Sha Wan and Kwai Chung. A 39-year-old male director of the trading company was arrested. Investigation revealed that the trading company involved jointly occupied the office in Kwai Chung with a logistics company. Customs officers yesterday also arrested a 47-year-old female director of the logistics company at that office. They have been released on bail pending further investigation. Customs has seized four computers for further investigation during the operation.

Moreover, samples of the masks involved in the case have been sent to a laboratory for tests on the bacterial count.

Investigation is ongoing and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Customs has conducted a large-scale territory-wide special operation

codenamed "Guardian" since January 27 this year to conduct spot checks and enforcement operations on common protective items. More than 5 800 officers have been mobilised to conduct over 37 000 inspections at retail spots. Investigations have been conducted against 13 cases of suspected violations of the TD0 and 13 cases of suspected violations of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO). Sixty-nine persons have been arrested so far and goods suspected of violating the law including nearly 3.725 million surgical masks, 306 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 tie in with the compliance promotion outreach programme in order to combat and prevent violation of relevant ordinances.

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

