

Hong Kong Customs mounts joint operation with Department of Health to combat unfair trade practices and unregistered medicines at medicine shop

Hong Kong Customs mounted a joint-operation with the Department of Health (DH) yesterday (October 12) to combat unfair trade practices and unregistered medicines at a medicine shop.

Customs officers conducted a test-buy operation at a medicine shop in Causeway Bay during the operation and arrested a 41-year-old salesman suspected to have applied a false trade description on a brand of medicine by stating it was a particular brand of medicine, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TD0) (Cap 362).

The DH officers then conducted a search at the premises and seized one type of suspected unregistered proprietary Chinese medicines (pCm) and nine types of suspected unregistered pharmaceutical products for further investigation. A 52-year-old owner of the medicine shop was arrested for suspected illegal possession of unregistered pCm and unregistered pharmaceutical products, in contravention of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (CMO) (Cap 549) and the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (PPO) (Cap 138).

Investigation is ongoing and the arrested persons have been released on bail pending further investigation.

Under the TD0, any person who in the course of any trade or business applies a false trade description to any goods or services commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

According to the CMO, no person shall sell, import or possess any pCm unless the pCm is registered. The maximum penalty involved is a fine of \$100,000 and two years' imprisonment for each offence.

According to the PPO, all pharmaceutical products must be registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong before they can be legally sold in the market. Illegal sale or possession of unregistered pharmaceutical products are criminal offences. The maximum penalty for each offence is a fine of \$100,000 and two years' imprisonment.

Customs reminds traders to comply with the requirements of the TD0 and consumers to procure products at reputable shops.

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

"The public should not buy or use products of doubtful composition or from unknown sources. All registered pCms should carry a Hong Kong registration number on the product label in the format of 'HKC-XXXXX' or 'HKP-XXXXX'. All registered pharmaceutical products should carry a Hong Kong registration number on the package in the format of 'HK-XXXXX'. Safety, quality and efficacy of unregistered pCms or pharmaceutical products are not guaranteed," a DH spokesman said.