

Hong Kong Customs mounts special operation against unfair trade practices by fitness centres

Hong Kong Customs has mounted a special operation codenamed "Tornado" since the end of last year against unfair trade practices by fitness centres. Customs officers conducted the fourth phase of the enforcement operation from November 4 to today (November 13). Five persons were arrested after being suspected of having engaged in aggressive commercial practices in the course of selling fitness services in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO). Around \$130,000 is involved in the service contracts.

Customs officers earlier received information alleging that staff members of a fitness centre in Mong Kok imposed undue influence and used aggressive commercial practices when selling fitness services to customers, forcing them to procure a fitness club membership.

Subsequent to an in-depth investigation, Customs officers took enforcement actions and arrested five men. Aged between 22 and 26, they comprise one director and four salespersons of the fitness centre.

The operation is ongoing.

Up to today, 19 persons have been arrested during the "Tornado" operation after engaging in aggressive commercial practices in the course of selling fitness services in contravention of the TDO. The arrested persons, aged between 21 and 43, comprise four directors and 15 salespersons of the fitness centres. A total of about \$1.9 million is involved in the service contracts.

Customs reminds traders that they must comply with the requirements of the TDO. Consumers are also reminded to procure services from reputable shops.

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, Hong Kong Customs pledges that it will continue its stringent enforcement actions against such practices by fitness centres.

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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).