

Hong Kong Customs' "Operation Guardian" combats illegal sale of surgical masks on Internet

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (March 23) conducted a special operation to combat the illegal sale of surgical masks on the Internet. A woman was arrested for being suspected of having applied false trade descriptions or a forged trademark in the sale of surgical masks on a social network platform, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO).

Customs earlier received information from an authorised representative of a registered trademark, alleging that their trademark and photos were being used on a bogus page of a social network platform for selling suspected infringing surgical masks.

After an initial investigation, Customs found that the design, photos, colour and wordings of the bogus page highly resembled that of the official page of the trademark representative. The bogus page claimed that surgical masks could be offered for sale in its posts, which intended to mislead customers that the masks were that of the trademark's products. The bogus page also canvassed customers with the statement "surgical masks speedpost", claiming that priority would be given to particular groups. Customers were requested to make a deposit into their designated bank accounts before they would be notified them about the product's delivery.

Upon further investigation, Customs yesterday arrested a 25-year-old woman in Kwai Chung in suspected connection with the case. An investigation is ongoing. The likelihood of further arrests has not been excluded.

This action was part of the "Guardian" operation, which is a large-scale territory-wide special operation launched by Customs on January 27 this year to combat the supply and sale of common protective items that violated the TDO and the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance. Apart from conducting inspections at retail spots selling protective items in various districts, Customs also deployed Internet investigation teams to detect and analyse online activities for combating suspicious sellers on the Internet.

The "Guardian" operation will continue and Customs will take enforcement action if any irregularities are detected.

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

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