

Hong Kong Customs seizes 68 000 surgical masks with suspected false manufacturing date

Hong Kong Customs today (January 30) seized a total of 68 000 surgical masks with suspected false manufacturing date from a pharmacy in Mong Kok. The seized items carry an estimated market value of about \$380,000. A person-in-charge of the pharmacy was arrested.

Customs officers launched a large-scale territory-wide special operation codenamed "Guardian" on January 27 to inspect retail spots in different districts that sell surgical masks. Customs officers today received information alleging that a pharmacy in Mong Kok sold surgical masks with suspected false manufacturing date. Officers took immediate action and went to a pharmacy located on Nelson Street, where they seized a batch of surgical masks with suspected false manufacturing date of March 2020. A 27-year-old male person-in-charge of the pharmacy was arrested.

The surgical masks were packed in boxes with each contained 50 pieces and were sold at \$280.

Customs will look into the sources of the seizure. Samples will also be sent to the Government Laboratory for safety test.

Customs attaches great importance to the trade description and safety aspects of surgical masks. The "Guardian" operation has been lasting for four days with over 1 300 retail spots selling surgical masks were inspected.

The special operation is ongoing and the department will continue to make immediate announcements if any irregularities are spotted.

Customs reminds members of the public to observe the following tips when purchasing surgical masks:

- Pay attention to the information on the packages, including the manufacturing and expiry dates;
- Check the surgical masks to see if any dirt or trace of being used before making purchases;
- Check with the shopkeepers immediately when there is any doubt; and
- Purchase at reputable shops;

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

Under the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO), it is an offence to

supply, manufacture or import into Hong Kong consumer goods unless the goods comply with the general safety requirements for consumer goods. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year on first conviction, and \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on subsequent conviction.

Customs has all along attached great importance to public safety and consumer rights. Law enforcement action will be taken immediately if any violation of the TD0 or the CGSO is detected.

Customs sternly reminds traders not to take advantage of the situation and sell products with false origins or false trademarks, or unsafe consumer goods. Immediate enforcement action will be taken and prosecution will be made with sufficient evidence if any trader is found doing the above act.

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). Customs will look into every report and take necessary follow-up.