

Hong Kong Customs' special operation against unfair trade practices by fitness centre

Hong Kong Customs has mounted a special operation codenamed "Tornado" since the end of last year against unfair trade practices by fitness centres. Until yesterday (April 7), 14 persons were arrested for suspected of having engaged in aggressive commercial practices in the course of selling fitness service, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO). Around \$1.14 million is involved in the service contracts.

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

Subsequent to an in-depth investigation, a series of enforcement actions were taken, resulting in the arrest of 14 persons as of yesterday. The arrested persons comprise two directors and 12 salespersons of the fitness centres. Aged between 21 and 27, they have been released on bail pending further investigation.

The operation is still ongoing.

Hong Kong Customs today (April 8) reminds again that traders must comply with the requirements of the TDO. Consumers are also reminded to procure services from reputable shops. Before making a purchase decision, consumers must not give their identity cards, credit cards or automated teller machine cards to salespersons. They must also refuse firmly to sign any paper if they do not fully understand the service and price details, or if they do not intend to make a purchase.

Under the TDO, any trader commits an offence of engaging in aggressive commercial practices if harassment, coercion or undue influence is used to impair 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.

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