

Hong Kong Customs steps up spot checks at fruit retail shops and toy shops in light of Mid-Autumn Festival (with photos)

With the Mid-Autumn Festival approaching, Hong Kong Customs launched territory-wide spot checks and test purchases at fruit retail shops and toy shops early this month. The operation has been conducted for about three weeks and eight fruit retail shops were found to have supplied fruits with suspected false claims of origin and short-weight fruits. A further two retail shops were found to have supplied suspected unsafe toys.

In respect of fruits, Customs found five fruit retail shops in To Kwa Wan, Shatin, Mong Kok and North Point to have supplied grapes in bags with suspected false claims of origin, that were marked as Australian grapes but the packaging bags bore the marking "Product of USA" or "Produce of USA". About 31 kilograms of grapes connected with the cases with a total retail value of about \$2,200 were seized at the five retail shops involved. During the operation, five women and one man aged between 38 and 71 were arrested. They were released on bail pending further investigation.

Besides, three fruit retail shops in Aberdeen, Sai Ying Pun and Kwai Chung were found to be suspected of violating the Weights and Measures Ordinance (WMO) by claiming the weight of goods sold was heavier than the actual weight. Examinations by the Government Laboratory revealed that the shortage between the net weight and the claimed weight of the grapes supplied by the three fruit retail shops has ranged from 3 per cent to 6 per cent. About seven pounds of fruits with a total retail value of about \$160 were test-purchased at the retail shops involved.

In respect of toys, Customs found that two retail shops in Tsuen Wan sold two models of glow sticks with no identification markings and bilingual warnings or cautions, in contravention of the Toys and Children's Products Safety Ordinance (TCPSO) and its subsidiary legislation, the Toys and Children's Products Safety (Additional Safety Standards or Requirements) Regulation. A total of 30 items of the two models of glow sticks suspected of violating the regulation were seized by Customs at those two retail shops. The total retail value was about \$430.

Investigations of all the cases are ongoing.

Customs reminds consumers to purchase products from reputable shops. Apart from paying attention to the information given by a salesperson, they should also inspect the product descriptions carefully and keep the transaction receipts. Customs also reminds traders not to take advantage of the current situation and not to sell goods in a misleading manner or products with a false claim of origin. Immediate enforcement action will be

taken against contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO) and prosecution will be made with sufficient evidence.

Customs will also continue to take stringent enforcement action against short-weight activities to protect consumer interests and uphold a fair trading environment. Members of the public are advised to observe the following tips when making purchases:

- Pay attention to the weighing equipment to see whether the reading is set at "0", and whether the container is clear;
- Pay attention to the act and process of weighing by the seller; the weighting scale reading side should face towards the customer;
- Request and keep the transaction receipts for easy follow-ups in the future when necessary; and
- Use a public scale to check the weight of the goods.

Customs further reminds members of the public to observe the following safety tips when purchasing toys:

- Pay attention to age recommendations shown on labels;
- Pay attention to and follow the instructions associated with the toys;
- Beware of whether the small parts of toys are easily detachable. Detached small parts may block a child's throat and lead to suffocation if swallowed;
- Check the structure of the toys to see, for example, whether they have a fragile structure, hidden sharp points, rough surfaces, sharp edges or gaps that may pinch children's fingers;
- Throw away plastic packages of toys and children's products to avoid children being suffocated; and
- Stop children from playing with the toys immediately if any damage is observed.

Under the 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, commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Under the WMO, any person who in the course of trade supplies goods to another person by weight or measure should supply the goods in net weight or net measure. Any shortage in the quantity purporting to be supplied is an offence. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$10,000. Moreover, any person who uses for trade or has in his possession for use for trade any weighing or measuring equipment which is false or defective commits an offence. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$20,000.

Under the TCPSO, it is an offence to import, manufacture or supply toys for local consumption unless the toys comply with prescribed safety standards. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year on first conviction, and a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on subsequent conviction.

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

