

Hong Kong Customs urges public to stop using one type of disinfectant alcohol with suspected false description on composition and toxic methanol (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs today (October 12) searched a pharmacy and seized three bottles of disinfectant alcohol with suspected false descriptions of composition and toxic methanol content. A director of the pharmacy was arrested. Customs appeals to members of the public to stop using this type of disinfectant alcohol. Traders should also remove the product from their shelves.

Customs earlier test-purchased a type of disinfectant alcohol at a pharmacy in Cheung Sha Wan which was labelled as containing 95 per cent ethanol. The disinfectant alcohol was put on sale in transparent plastic bottles at a price of \$90 per bottle. Customs officers later sent samples of the disinfectant alcohol to the Government Laboratory to establish its composition and safety.

Customs earlier received the test results which revealed that the disinfectant alcohol consisted of 90 per cent methanol, while its ethanol content was less than 2.7 per cent.

The ethanol content of the disinfectant alcohol was different from the product description according to the test results. It also contained toxic methanol. The product was therefore suspected to be in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO) and the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO).

Noting the test results, Customs conducted an immediate enforcement action and searched the pharmacy today. Three bottles of disinfectant alcohol with suspected false descriptions of composition were seized and a 48-year-old male director of the pharmacy was arrested.

Apart from the pharmacy concerned, a total of 290 retail spots in various districts were also checked and no such product was found for sale.

Customs will further examine the seized disinfectant alcohol product to establish its safety.

An investigation is ongoing.

Customs reminds members of the public to observe the following safety tips when purchasing disinfectant alcohol:

- Pay attention to the product descriptions shown on the labels, including the manufacturing date and validity period;
- Avoid choosing disinfectant alcohol with unknown sources and limited information; and
- Purchase products from recognised brands at reputable shops.

This test-purchase operation is part of the "Guardian" special operation, which has been running for nearly nine months as of today since its launch on January 27. More than 6 000 officers have been mobilised to conduct over 38 000 inspections at retail spots in various districts. The operation will continue.

Customs sternly reminds traders not to sell products using unfair trade practices. They must also not sell products with false origins nor must they sell unsafe consumer goods. Immediate law enforcement actions will be taken and prosecutions will be made with sufficient evidence.

Under the TD0, 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 CGS0, it is an offence to import, manufacture or supply 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 a subsequent conviction.

Members of the public may report any suspected violation of the TD0 or the CGS0 to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

