

Hong Kong Customs urges public to stop using two types of disinfectant alcohol with suspected toxic methanol and false descriptions on composition (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs today (November 20) arrested a pharmacy manager and a sole proprietor of an air-conditioning works company for selling disinfectant alcohol with suspected false trade descriptions of composition and toxic methanol content. Customs appeals to members of the public to stop using these two types of disinfectant alcohol. Traders should also remove the product from their shelves.

Customs earlier received information alleging the sale of a type of disinfectant alcohol at a pharmacy in Sai Wan, which was labelled as containing 75 per cent ethanol and put on sale in white plastic bottles at a price of \$110 per bottle.

Officers also test-purchased another type of disinfectant alcohol from an air-conditioning works company in Kwun Tong, which was labelled as containing 75 per cent ethanol. Labelled as containing 100 millilitres, the disinfectant alcohol was put on sale in transparent plastic spray bottles and sold at a price of \$10 per bottle.

Customs sent samples of the two types of disinfectant alcohol to the Government Laboratory to establish their composition and safety.

Customs received the test results of the two types of disinfectant alcohol sold in Sai Wan and Kwun Tong, which revealed that they contained 41 and 67 per cent methanol respectively, while their ethanol content was only 30 and 0.1 per cent respectively. The actual volume of the disinfectant alcohol test-purchased in Kwun Tong was only 88 millilitres.

According to the test results, the two types of disinfectant alcohol contained toxic methanol and their ethanol contents were different from the product descriptions. One of them also carried a false volume claim. The products were 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 immediate enforcement action, searching the pharmacy and the air-conditioning works company today. A 59-year-old male manager of the pharmacy and a 48-year-old female owner of the air-conditioning works company were arrested. No further seizures of the two types of disinfectant alcohol were made during the operation.

Apart from the pharmacy and the air-conditioning works company

concerned, inspection on retail spots in various districts were also conducted and no such product was found for sale.

Investigations are 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.

Customs started a large-scale territory-wide special spot-check operation codenamed "Guardian" on January 27 this year, which has been running for nearly 10 months as of today. More than 6 200 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).

