

Surgical masks test-purchased by Hong Kong Customs comply with requirements of Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance

Hong Kong Customs launched a large-scale territory-wide special operation codenamed "Guardian" on January 27 to conduct spot checks, test purchases and inspections in various districts on surgical masks available in the market. As at yesterday (February 5), over 6 000 inspections were conducted at retail spots selling surgical masks and more than 50 samples have been test-purchased. Safety tests on total fungal counts for 20 test-purchased samples have been conducted initially. All samples comply with safety requirements and no violations of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO) have yet been found yet. The remaining samples are still undergoing safety tests and the results will be announced as soon as possible.

The relevant samples were test-purchased from different retail spots in various districts, including chain stores, pharmacies, medicine stores and shops selling daily necessities. They were then sent to the Government Laboratory for tests. Of the 20 tested samples of surgical masks, 15 were in proper packaging and five were in loose packaging. Among those 15 samples of surgical masks, most were packed in 50-piece packages, while others were packed in packages of five, 10 and 20 pieces.

As at today (February 6), the "Guardian" operation has been underway for 11 days. During the operation, Customs officers seized 68 000 surgical masks with suspected false manufacturing date from a pharmacy in Mong Kok on January 30. An investigation of the case, including the sources of the seizure, is ongoing.

The "Guardian" operation will carry on. Customs will continue to inspect retail locations of surgical masks and conduct test-buy operations to ensure that the surgical masks being sold in the market comply with the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO) and the CGSO. Customs stresses that the department will continue to promptly issue update announcements if any irregularities are spotted.

Under the CGSO, 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.

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, 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.

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 CGS0 is detected.

Customs reminds traders not to sell products with false origins or false trademarks, or unsafe consumer goods. Members of the public should also make purchases at reputable shops.

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).