

Hong Kong Customs detects largest-ever counterfeit face mask case (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a special operation against counterfeit face masks on January 14 and seized about 330 000 suspected counterfeit medical-grade face masks intended to be transshipped overseas via Hong Kong, with an estimated market value of about \$8.5 million. In terms of both quantity or seizure value, this case has surpassed two similar cases involving about 100 000 suspected counterfeit medical-grade face masks detected on October 28 and November 3 last year, and has become the largest-ever suspected counterfeit face mask case detected by Customs.

Customs earlier received information alleging that a batch of suspected counterfeit face masks would be transshipped overseas via Hong Kong. After an investigation with the assistance of the trademark owner, Customs took enforcement action on the above-mentioned date and raided a logistics company in Kwai Chung where the batch of suspected counterfeit medical-grade face masks were seized.

Initial investigations revealed that the batch of face masks has not entered the local retail market. It was believed that unscrupulous merchants intended to transship the batch of masks overseas for sale and profit. Customs is looking into the source of the face masks involved in the case. Samples have also been sent to a laboratory for a safety test.

An investigation is ongoing.

Under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO), any person who sells or possesses for sale any goods with a forged trade mark commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Customs has conducted a territory-wide special operation codenamed "Guardian" since January 27 last year to conduct spot checks and enforcement operations on common protective items. More than 6 400 officers have been mobilised to conduct nearly 40 000 inspections at retail spots. Investigations have been conducted against 24 cases of suspected violations of the TDO and 13 cases of suspected violations of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO). Eighty-eight persons have been arrested so far and goods suspected of violating the law including about 6.23 million surgical masks, 317 bottles of disinfectant alcohol and 23 bottles of normal saline have been seized.

The "Guardian" operation will continue and Customs will carry on its high-profile law enforcement to combat and prevent violation of relevant ordinances. Customs will also maintain close contact with trademark owners in monitoring the market situation with a view to proactively combating

counterfeit protective items.

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

