

# Hong Kong Customs mounts special operation against unfair trade practices by employment agency

Hong Kong Customs mounted a special enforcement action codenamed "Phantom" in recent months against unfair trade practices by employment agencies. During the operation, two saleswomen were arrested for being suspected of having applied false trade descriptions in the course of selling employment agency services, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO). The service contracts sum involved was about \$180,000.

Customs officers earlier received information alleging that staff members of two employment agencies in Kwun Tong and To Kwa Wan were suspected of making false claims in the sale of employment agency services to foreign domestic helpers that the company was a licensed employment agency and could arrange foreign domestic helpers' relatives and friends to come and work in Hong Kong. However, no such job applications were made by the companies.

After an investigation, Customs arrested two saleswomen of the employment agency, aged 54 and 42, one of whom was the mastermind. A total of eight victims were involved and the sum of the service contracts amounted to about \$180,000.

The operation "Phantom" is ongoing.

The Group Head (Unfair Trade Practice Investigation), Ms Suzette Ip, said at a press conference today (March 17) that Customs will continue to step up enforcement to combat unfair trade practices by employment agencies.

She reminded traders that they must comply with the requirements of the TDO. Consumers are also reminded to procure services from reputable shops. Before purchasing an employment agency service, consumers should conduct research on the company background and related job application procedures and details. Before filling in any documents, consumers should clearly understand the purpose of the documents and pay special attention to the terms and conditions as listed. When in doubt, do not provide personal information, sign documents and make transactional decisions lightly.

Under the TDO, any trader who applies a false trade description to a service supplied to a consumer commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

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