

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

Hong Kong Customs today (February 21) searched an office of a pharmacy group and its 20 branches in various districts across the territory as well as over 230 retail spots and seized a total of 174 bottles of disinfectant alcohol with suspected false description on composition. A director and six salespersons of the pharmacy were arrested. Customs appeals to members of the public to stop using that type of disinfectant alcohol. Traders should take off the products from the shelves as well.

Customs earlier received information alleging the sale of disinfectant alcohol with suspected false description on composition at a pharmacy in Tuen Mun. Customs officers were then deployed for immediate action to test-purchase a type of disinfectant alcohol in plastic bottles labelled as "75% ethanol" at the abovementioned pharmacy. The disinfectant alcohol were put on sale in white plastic bottles labelled as 1 litre and was sold at a price of \$98 per bottle. Samples were sent to the Government Laboratory to establish its composition and safety.

Customs yesterday (February 20) received the test results which revealed that the type of disinfectant alcohol concerned consists of less than 0.1% of ethanol while its methanol content reaches 52%. The test also revealed that the actual volume of the bottle of disinfectant alcohol was only 737 milliliters.

The composition of the disinfectant alcohol was different from the product description according to the test results, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO).

Noted the test results, Customs conducted immediate enforcement action and searched concurrently the pharmacy group's office in Tuen Mun and its 20 branches located at various districts. A total of 174 bottles of disinfectant alcohol with suspected false description on composition were seized with arrests of seven men, aged between 24 and 43.

Apart from the group's office and branches, a total of 236 retail spots in various districts were also checked today and no such products were found for sale.

Methanol is a type of organic solvent which is harmful to human bodies and might cause blindness or even death if being accidentally eaten or misused.

Customs will further examine the seized disinfectant alcohol product to

establish its safety.

Investigation is ongoing.

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

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

The following should also be observed when using disinfectant alcohol:

- Do not get close to heat or fire sources;
- Do not smoke; and
- Cover the container immediately after use.

This operation is part of the "Guardian" operation, which has been running out for 26 days as of today since its launch on January 27. More than 2 300 officers have been mobilised to conduct over 15 000 inspections at retail spots in various districts to ensure that common protective items sold in the market comply with the TD0 and the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO).

The "Guardian" operation will continue and Customs will carry on stepping up enforcement actions to combat activities that are in violation of the relevant ordinances. The department will continue to make prompt public updates if irregularities are detected.

Customs sternly reminds traders not to take advantage of the current situation and not to sell products using unfair trade practices. They must also not sell products with false origins or false trademarks, 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, 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.

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.

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).

