

SWD stringently combats abuses and frauds in relation to Traffic Accident Victims Assistance

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) noted that a woman earlier charged by the Independent Commission Against Corruption for fraud over Traffic Accident Victims Assistance (TAVA) payments pleaded guilty at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts today (April 25).

An SWD spokesman said that the department has long been strictly verifying every TAVA application, including seeking written confirmation from the Police on whether a traffic accident is involved and maintaining close liaison with the Hospital Authority and the Department of Health to ensure the injuries sustained by the applicants are related to the traffic accidents concerned. In addition, the SWD also strengthens the procedures of checking income proof, verifies whether the applicants have made any claim for damages or compensation through other means for the same traffic accident and informs insurance companies in writing on the disbursement of payment in a timely manner to avoid double compensation. Any cases found suspected of involving criminal elements will be handled with caution, while referrals will also be made to law enforcement agencies for investigations.

The spokesman stressed that the SWD will continue to step up random checks to strictly combat any abuses or frauds related to TAVA. Any person who possesses information about improper or illegal activities by any person in applying for relevant assistance may lodge a report to the SWD or the law enforcement agencies.

The TAVA Scheme is a social welfare initiative administered by the SWD to provide speedy financial assistance to road traffic accident victims or the surviving dependents of deceased traffic accident victims. An applicant must meet relevant conditions in order to be eligible for assistance payment, including: (1) the accident must have been reported to the Police and determined by the Police as a road traffic accident; and (2) the victim is injured or killed in the accident. In case of injury, the injured victim must be certified by a registered doctor that such injury requires hospitalisation of no less than three days or issued with proof for medical leave of no less than three days.

DH responds to media enquiries on case of importing alternative smoking products

In response to media enquiries about a convicted case of importing alternative smoking products (ASPs), a spokesman for the Department of Health (DH) today (April 25) reiterated that the government has always been taking stringent enforcement actions to deter illegal activities under the relevant ordinances.

The Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department intercepted a man in the West Kowloon Station of the Express Rail Link on January 28, 2024, when over 100 ASPs were found on him and in his luggage. Upon investigation by the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the DH, the man was charged with contravening the Import and Export Ordinance (Cap. 60) by importing ASPs. He was convicted at the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts today, and fined \$5,000.

According to the Import and Export Ordinance (Cap. 60), a person who imports alternative smoking products, including electronic smoking products, heated tobacco products and herbal cigarettes, commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years; or is liable on conviction on indictment to a fine of \$2,000,000 and imprisonment for seven years.

Moreover, in accordance with the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371), no person may promote, manufacture, sell, or possess for commercial purposes alternative smoking products, offender is liable to a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The spokesman stressed that TACO has always been closely monitoring and taking stringent enforcement actions against violations of the ordinances. TACO will also conduct an investigation upon receiving complaints or referrals, and lay charges against offenders when sufficient evidence is found. Since the ban on ASPs came into effect on April 30, 2022, more than 350 cases have been convicted of importing ASPs as of March 31, 2024. The highest penalty for these convicted cases was a fine of \$24,000.

The spokesman cautioned against the use of any ASPs and stressed that these products contain amounts of nicotine similar to those of conventional cigarettes in order to sustain addiction. In addition, health hazards of long-term exposure to ASPs are unknown. The Government appeals to smokers to quit smoking as early as possible for their own health and that of others. They are encouraged to call the DH's Integrated Smoking Cessation Hotline on 1833 183, and information on smoking cessation can also be obtained from www.livetobaccofree.hk.

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected dangerous drugs worth about \$2.6 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs on April 20 and yesterday (April 24) seized a total of about 5.6 kilograms of suspected ketamine and about 120 grams of suspected crack cocaine with a total estimated market value of about \$2.6 million in the New Territories. Two men were arrested.

Acting on intelligence analysis, Customs on April 20 raided a logistics warehouse in the New Territories and seized about 5.6kg of suspected ketamine from four carton boxes.

After a follow-up investigation and a controlled delivery operation, Customs officers yesterday arrested two local men, aged 18 and 22, who were suspected to be connected with the case in Kwai Chung.

Customs officers later escorted one of the arrested men to his rented flat nearby for a search, and further seized about 120g of suspected crack cocaine, about 10g of suspected ketamine and a batch of drug packaging paraphernalia.

The two arrested men have been jointly charged with one count of trafficking in a dangerous drug. The 22-year-old man has been additionally charged with one count of trafficking in a dangerous drug. They will appear at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts tomorrow (April 26).

Under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, trafficking in a dangerous drug is a serious offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment. Members of the public may report any suspected drug trafficking activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).



Company and its director fined \$78,000 for contravening Employment Ordinance

Red Health Products Company Limited and its director were prosecuted by the Labour Department (LD) for violation of the requirements under the Employment Ordinance (EO). The company and its director pleaded guilty at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts today (April 25) and were fined a total sum of \$78,000.

The company wilfully and without reasonable excuse contravened the requirements of the EO, failing to pay two employees' wages and payment in lieu of notice within seven days after the expiry of the wage periods and termination of employment, as well as end-of-year payment and annual leave pay within the statutory time limit, totalling about \$220,000. The company also failed to pay the awarded sums of about \$241,000 in total to the two employees within 14 days after the date set by the Labour Tribunal (LT). The director concerned was prosecuted and convicted for his consent, connivance or neglect in the above wage and default award offences.

"The ruling will disseminate a strong message to all employers, directors and responsible officers of companies that they have to pay wages and termination payments to employees within the statutory time limit stipulated in the EO, as well as the sums awarded by the LT or the Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board," a spokesman for the LD said.

"The LD will not tolerate these offences and will spare no effort in enforcing the law and safeguarding employees' statutory rights," the spokesman added.

Cross-boundary passenger traffic estimation and arrangements announced for Labour Day festive period

The Immigration Department (ImmD) estimates that around 5.9 million passengers (including Hong Kong residents and visitors) will pass through Hong Kong's sea, land and air control points during the upcoming Labour Day festive period (from April 30 to May 5). The ImmD, in consultation with the Shenzhen General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection, estimates that around 5.05 million passengers will pass through land boundary control

points. The number of outbound passengers and inbound passengers using land boundary control points will be relatively higher on May 1 (Wednesday), with around 481 000 passengers and 544 000 passengers respectively.

The ImmD estimates that the passenger traffic at the Lo Wu Control Point, the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Control Point will be heavy, with a daily average forecast of about 203 000, 166 000 and 133 000 passengers respectively.

To cope with the anticipated heavy traffic during the festive period, the ImmD has minimised leave for frontline officers for the flexible deployment and operation of extra clearance counters and kiosks. Additional security guards will also be deployed to provide crowd management support.

Furthermore, the ImmD, the Police, the Customs and Excise Department and the MTR Corporation Limited will set up a joint command centre at the Lo Wu Control Point to make necessary arrangements. The ImmD will also establish close communication with the Mainland authorities, such as the Shenzhen General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection. To ensure a smooth passenger traffic flow, passenger conditions will be closely monitored and appropriate traffic diversion plans will be adopted when necessary.

To avoid congestion and a longer than usual waiting time for immigration clearance, the ImmD advises all land boundary passengers to plan in advance, avoid making their journeys during busy periods and keep track of radio and TV broadcasts on traffic conditions at various control points. The expected busy times at boundary control points are available on the website of the ImmD at www.immd.gov.hk. Furthermore, passengers may also check the estimated waiting times at each land boundary control point at any time or place via the Immigration Mobile Application (ImmD Mobile App). They can then plan their trips effectively and save time queuing at control points. The ImmD Mobile App can be downloaded free of charge from the Apple App Store (supports iOS version 11.0 or above), Google Play (supports Android version 8.0 or above), Huawei AppGallery (supports Android version 8.0 or above) and the APK file available on the ImmD website. Passengers can download the ImmD Mobile App by scanning the QR code (see Annex) or via the ImmD website, www.immd.gov.hk. In addition, information on public transport services to and from various control points is available on the Transport Department website at www.td.gov.hk.

For travellers making journeys to the Mainland, the ImmD reminds them to carry their proof of identity and valid travel documents for crossing the boundary. Hong Kong residents should also check the validity of their Home Visit Permits. Non-permanent residents must carry their valid smart identity card as well as their Document of Identity for Visa Purposes or valid travel document.

Holders of the acknowledgement receipt issued due to reported loss or replacement of their Hong Kong identity cards, or children under 11 years old who hold Hong Kong identity cards, should carry a valid travel document or Re-entry Permit.

About 700 e-Channels have been installed at various control points. Hong Kong residents enrolled for the Express e-Channel should re-enrol if they have been issued with a new identity card. Furthermore, the Contactless e-Channel service is available at all control points now. All eligible Hong Kong residents, after enrolment, can generate an encrypted QR code through the Contactless e-Channel mobile application to enter the e-Channel, and then verify their identity with the facial verification technology for automated immigration clearance.

In addition, all control points have introduced self-service departures for visitors to Hong Kong (Smart Departure) which provides greater travel convenience for visitors. The service employs facial recognition technology for identity verification, which allows eligible visitors holding electronic travel documents to perform self-service departure clearance through Smart Departure e-Channels without prior enrolment.

Hong Kong residents who require assistance while travelling outside Hong Kong may call the 24-hour hotline of the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the ImmD at (852) 1868.