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**QUEENS DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE SEIZES 1.7 MILLION PIECES
OF COUNTERFEIT PERSONAL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT FROM WAREHOUSE;
BROOKLYN MAN CHARGED WITH FELONY FOR POSSESSING BOGUS PPE**

*Pallets Piled High with Imitation N95 Masks Awaiting Sale
Found in Dirty and Dusty Long Island City Building;
Believed to Be One of the Largest, Single Seizures Since Pandemic Began;
Defendant Faces Up to 15 Years in Prison if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that an investigation by her Office's Frauds Bureau resulted in the seizure of 1.7 million counterfeit 3M N95 respirator masks from a Long Island City warehouse before they could be distributed to the public.

Detectives from the Queens District Attorney's Office arrested Zhi Zeng, 33, of Dyker Heights, Brooklyn. Zeng has been charged with trademark counterfeiting, a C felony, for possessing and selling the fake 3M labeled medical masks.

Queens District Attorney Katz said, "We are living in a horrible pandemic with more than 450,000 Americans dead from Covid-19. This defendant allegedly sold false hope and security and was set to sell more of these counterfeit masks to whomever would pay his price. Masks are life-saving equipment for our medical professionals. Every day these essential workers are putting their lives – and their family's lives - at risk providing healthcare to those affected by this heartless disease. We have confiscated the bogus merchandise and none of these unsafe masks will be distributed to the public or healthcare workers going forward."

Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York, said "Since the pandemic began, HSI New York's partnership with the Queens DA has yielded multiple criminal arrests of those who import and distribute counterfeit PPE or choose to hoard and price gouge legitimate products. The public's safety, especially that of our healthcare workers, is a priority, and we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that each mask that is worn by our first responders is the real deal."

Zeng, 33, of 85th Street in Dyker Heights, was arraigned yesterday morning before Queens Criminal Court Judge Eugene Guarino on a complaint charging him with one count of trademark counterfeiting in the first degree. The defendant was ordered to return to Court on April 27, 2021. If convicted, Zeng faces up to 15 years in prison.

According to the charges, the defendant is the warehouse manager and was present in the 51st Avenue warehouse when law enforcement raided the facility and discovered pallets piled high with boxes of 3M-labeled

N95 masks – model No. 1860. The building had two floors, roughly 2,000 square feet per floor, and both levels contained stacks and stacks of these boxes.

A total of 1,788,340 masks were seized.

Hundreds of thousands of pieces of other types of PPE – including brand-name hand sanitizers and disinfecting wipes, children’s masks, construction masks, and gowns – were also found in the warehouse. Queens District Attorney investigators have begun working with companies to determine the authenticity of these products.

DA Katz said the investigation, which is on-going, began when her Office received information that suspected counterfeit masks were being offered for sale from a warehouse located at 5-06 51st Avenue in Long Island City. Acting on this information, investigators posed as undercover buyers and purchased masks on several dates to verify the respirator masks’ authenticity. The masks were being offered for sale at prices ranging from \$2.95 - \$3.25 apiece. According to 3M, the suggested retail price for N95 masks is \$1.27.

Investigators have identified a healthcare system in the southern United States that bought 200,000 of these same masks from the same warehouse for more than \$700,000. The DA’s Frauds Bureau has reached out to our law enforcement partners to determine if any other medical facilities were conned into buying these unsafe masks.

Assistant District Attorney Ayelet Sela, of the District Attorney’s Fraud Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Joseph Conley, Bureau Chief, Herman Wun, Deputy Bureau Chief, under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard A. Brave.

It should be noted that a criminal complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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