

Flat-out mad

Aggressive canvassing by a property agent led to a punch-up with a security guard in an upmarket Kowloon mall.

Colleen Lee, Samson Lee, Lisa Onland and Karen Ha

Monday, July 18, 2011

Aggressive canvassing by a property agent led to a punch-up with a security guard in an upmarket Kowloon mall.

It ended with both of them at Queen Elizabeth Hospital for treatment and then under arrest at a police station.

The fracas topped two weeks of strains caused by hundreds of agents from several property firms descending on Elements, the mall atop Kowloon MTR station.

There, it is said, they have stopped and often annoyed shoppers while promoting the sales of flats at the nearby Sun Hung Kai Properties' luxury project Imperial Cullinan.

Hard selling turned into hard blows just after noon yesterday, police said, as a 49-year-old security guard named Pang told an agent, Chan, 30, to leave the MTR Corp-run mall.

Hot words degenerated into the brawl, with Chan allegedly slapping Pang on the side of the head and the guard fighting back.

According to an MTR spokesman, it was around 12.15pm when the security guard told a group of people blocking a passageway in the mall to move and one of them pushed him. The guard later reported to police.

As officers told it, they received a report at 12.23pm and arrested the two men. Chan had injuries to his face, mouth and neck while Pang had damage to his left ear.

The spokesman said there has been several complaints from shops, shoppers and residents against the touting. And people at Elements said there has been a conspicuous build-up of security there.

A concierge disclosed that about 60 security guards have been deployed daily since Sun Hung Kai opened a sales office for Imperial Cullinan at the International Commerce Center late last month.

The luxury property development is on Hoi Fai Road, a 10-minute walk from the Olympic MTR station in Tai Kok Tsui.

Agents say security guards previously only gave them verbal warnings if they handed out leaflets, but for the past week they have been asking them to leave.

Unconfirmed reports are that the agent involved in yesterday's brawl works for Hong Kong Property, though the agency declined to comment.

Besides that firm, Ricacorp Properties, Centaline Property and Midland Realty have sent agents to Elements.

A spokeswoman for the Estate Agents Authority - the agents' watchdog - said: "We're looking into the matter, but any disciplinary action will depend on the police investigation."

The authority, she added, has been monitoring the sales of Imperial Cullinan, but none of its people witnessed the brawl at Elements. She said there are guidelines against unscrupulous sales tactics, which include intercepting vehicles or distracting drivers.

In addition, property agencies must have written permission from developers if they plan to print promotional material about a property.

A local shopper at Elements, a man named Li, said he has been troubled by agents. They started the sales-pitch approaches "once I enter the mall," he said. "It's annoying."

He has visited the mall less frequently because of the touting, Li added.

Another shopper groaned: "An agent approached me when I was shopping at Mannings."

Thomas Ferrand, a French national who lives in an apartment above Elements, was among people in the mall yesterday with his daughter. He said he has been approached several times over the past week.

"I call them 'The Sharks,'" he said, adding he put up with the annoyance as he knows the agents will not be there for much longer. "If it happened all the time," he added, "then yes, I would complain."

But another local shopper, Winky Leung Chau-ping, said the agents were restrained and not aggressive.

"I told them I am not interested and they did not chase me," she said. "I don't think they are annoying."

People convicted of fighting can be jailed for up to a year and fined HK\$5,000.

Aggressive sales tactics, meanwhile, appear to have spilled across the border from Hong Kong. About 100 Centaline Property agents were seen in Shenzhen trying to flag down motorists along roads near the new City Square property development in the Futian district.