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Jail Time for Counterfeiter

By Liza Casabona

A counterfeiter responsible for the distribution of \$7 million in fake apparel was sentenced to almost five years in prison on Friday.

The U.S. Department of Justice said in a statement that Abbas Chouman, of Astoria, N.Y., was sentenced in the Eastern District of Virginia to 57 months in prison for one count of conspiracy to commit criminal copyright infringement. He was also ordered to pay \$7 million by Judge Henry E. Hudson.

Chouman was arrested in March 2007 for operating a wholesale clothing business in New York that sold counterfeits. He pled guilty to conspiracy on July 3.

The justice department said that Chouman ran a business under a few names including Gizmo Wear Inc., Tea Shirt Inc., T Shirt International Inc. and Jump Wear. Customers located throughout the country purchased clothing from the company in person or by phone. Phone orders were shipped via UPS. Recipients paid cash on delivery and UPS deposited the proceeds into an account for Gizmo Wear.

Among the brands counterfeited were Rocawear, Evisu, Ecko, Enyce and LRG. The clothing typically bore imitation logos that were identical to the genuine trademarks, said a justice department spokeswoman. Court documents were sealed.

Nearly \$19 million in COD payments were deposited into the Gizmo Wear account by UPS between December 2004 and September 2006, the Justice Department said in a statement.

Chouman was the fifth defendant sentenced as part of the operation. There were seven convictions in all. Chouman received the harshest sentence to date. The other defendants received punishments ranging from two years probation to 27 months in prison.

Arrests were made in four states. In addition to charges related to counterfeit apparel and shoes, some of the defendants were charged with illegally pirating CDs and DVDs.

The investigation was conducted by a task force that included representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Richmond office, U.S. Secret Service, Internal Revenue Service, U.S. Marshals Service and the Virginia State Police.