



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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2 January 2014

Ms Connie SZETO
Clerk to the Establishment Subcommittee
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms SZETO,

**Establishment Subcommittee of the Legislative Council
Follow-up matters raised in relation to the proposed creation
of one permanent post of Administrative Officer Staff Grade B
in the Food Branch of the Food and Health Bureau**

When the Establishment Subcommittee of the Legislative Council discussed the captioned matter in its meeting held on 11 December 2013, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide supplementary information on whether the food products (including edible oil and instant noodles) involved in the recent food incidents in Taiwan had been imported into Hong Kong. Our reply is set out below.

We believe that the incidents mentioned by the Chairman are the following three incidents:-

- (a) edible oil mixed with cottonseed oil;
- (b) noodle products containing added colouring matter “copper chlorophyll”; and
- (c) oil sachets of instant noodles containing heavy metal residues.

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has taken follow-up actions based on the information available immediately after learning about the incidents.

Edible oil mixed with cottonseed oil

On 21 October 2013, there were media reports saying that edible oil in Taiwan was mixed with cottonseed oil. The reports claimed that cottonseed oil might contain gossypol which was likely to affect sperm production and cause other reproduction problems. In 2008, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) conducted a safety assessment on gossypol and considered that the main toxic effect of gossypol was inhibiting sperm production. Gossypol is naturally present in cottonseeds, but can be removed during the manufacturing of edible oil with the application of modern cottonseed oil refining process. At present, in addition to edible oil, cottonseed oil can also be used for producing salad oil and margarine.

In light of the aforesaid reports, the Taiwan authority conducted tests on cottonseed oil and other cooking oil, and announced on 25 October 2013 that gossypol was not found in any of the products tested. CFS conducted a risk assessment on the incident and considered that the risk of affecting reproduction by refined cottonseed oil prepared by food manufacturers in accordance with good manufacturing practice (GMP) was very low.

Noodle products containing added colouring matter “copper chlorophyll”

On 7 November 2013, the Taiwan authority announced that added colouring matters copper chlorophyll and sodium copper chlorophyllin were found in Taiwanese noodle products. The incident has raised public concern over the possible toxic effects due to the presence of copper ion in these complexes. Copper is an essential nutrient to human body naturally present in food. It is an essential

constituent in a number of important enzyme systems and is closely linked with normal cellular metabolism.

Copper chlorophyll and sodium copper chlorophyllin are colouring matters produced by extracting chlorophyll from plants, followed by a process of chemical stabilisation. Both copper chlorophyll and sodium copper chlorophyllin are food additives permitted for use by the Codex Alimentarius Commission¹. According to an evaluation report of the Joint Food and Agriculture Organization / World Health Organization Expert Committee on Food Additives, there is no evidence to show that the intake of copper chlorophyll and sodium copper chlorophyllin from food can cause liver damage. Normal consumption of these colouring matters is innocuous to health.

At present, the use of colouring matters in food is regulated under the Colouring Matter in Food Regulations (Cap. 132 sub. leg. H) (the Regulations) in the food laws of Hong Kong. Both copper chlorophyll and sodium copper chlorophyllin are permitted colouring matters under the Regulations. The risk assessment conducted by the CFS in relation to the incident reveals that if food manufacturers use copper chlorophyll or sodium copper chlorophyllin in food preparation according to GMP, the food should not pose hazard to the health of consumers.

Oil sachets of instant noodles containing heavy metal residues

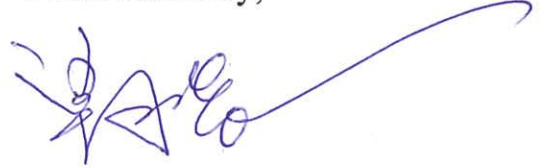
On 14 November 2013, there were media reports saying that heavy metal residues were detected in the oil sachets of a number of instant noodle products in Taiwan. CFS conducted a risk assessment using the test results reported in the media. Having regard to the reported levels of heavy metal residues, normal consumption of the products in question would unlikely have any adverse effect on health.

CFS has liaised with the Taiwan authority for further information on the three incidents mentioned above shortly after those

¹ The Codex Alimentarius Commission was established in 1963 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and World Health Organization as an international authority to set food-related standards and guidelines.

incidents came to CFS' attention through their surveillance mechanism. So far no products from the affected batches are known to be available for sale in Hong Kong. CFS will remain vigilant so as to ensure the food safety in Hong Kong to safeguard public health.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Leung', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

(Jeff LEUNG)
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c. Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
(Attn.: Mr Donald WONG) (Fax: 2530 1368)