



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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24 February 2014

Ms Alice LEUNG  
Clerk to the Panel on Food Safety and  
Environmental Hygiene  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong  
(Fax: 2509 9055)

Dear Ms Leung,

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
Detection of excessive cadmium in rice**

Thank you for your letter dated 10 February 2014 relaying Hon WONG Kwok-hing's concern over the detection of excessive cadmium in rice.

We appreciate that rice forms part of the usual diet of the general public and hence the need to ensure its safety for consumption. Under its risk-based regular Food Surveillance Programme, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has taken samples of a range of food items (including rice and cereal products on sale in Hong Kong) at import, wholesale and retail levels for testing to ensure their compliance with legal requirements and fitness for human consumption.

At present, heavy metal in food is regulated under the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V). The maximum permitted concentration of cadmium in cereal products (including rice) is 0.1mg/kg.

CFS has been monitoring the level of cadmium in rice. Between 2010 and 2013, CFS collected around 170 rice samples for testing of metallic

contaminants (including cadmium). Only one sample mentioned below (see the ensuing paragraph) failed the test on cadmium level.

In response to a study conducted by the Consumer Council in late 2013 as mentioned in Hon WONG's letter, in which three rice samples were detected with cadmium levels exceeding the legal limit, CFS immediately deployed staff to conduct checks on major retail outlets. One of the products concerned was found to be on sale. Tests for metallic contamination (including cadmium) were conducted on the sample of that product collected, with results indicating that the cadmium level was 0.28 mg/kg, exceeding the legal limit of 0.1 mg/kg. CFS promptly issued a press release and sent warning letters to the retailer and the distributor concerned, ordering them to suspend sale of the affected batch of the product to ensure food safety and safeguard public health. CFS will take appropriate enforcement actions against the parties concerned. Besides, CFS has notified the relevant Mainland authorities of the test results for follow-up.

Based on the level of cadmium detected in the rice sample concerned (0.28mg/kg), risk assessment findings revealed that normal consumption is unlikely to pose any adverse health effect for average consumers. However, for consumers with high level of rice intake (with a daily consumption of about three bowls of a total of 600 grams of cooked rice), long-term consumption of the same sample may affect their kidney function. It should be noted that a conservative approach has been adopted in the above risk assessment, under which it is assumed that all cadmium presented in the samples would be ingested by the consumers. The effect of processing, such as washing and cooking, on the reduction of cadmium content in the samples has not been taken into account.

CFS noted on 7 February 2014 through its regular Food Incident Surveillance System that the media (i.e. the rice samples testing conducted by the media as mentioned in Hon WONG's letter) had obtained in a local supermarket a sample of packaged white rice with undeclared origin. Laboratory tests found that the level of cadmium in that sample was 0.11 mg/kg, which was suspected to have exceeded the level permitted by the law. However, the media report concerned also pointed out that the margin of error for the tests was 0.02 mg/kg. Therefore, the sample concerned did not violate the requirement stipulated in the local legislation (i.e. the cadmium level in rice shall not exceed 0.1 mg/kg).

CFS will remain vigilant in carrying out its gate-keeping work properly, and continue to keep in view any new developments. Appropriate follow-up actions will also be taken when necessary to ensure food safety and safeguard public health.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henry Lai', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

(Henry LAI)

for Secretary for Food and Health

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