



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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Your ref. :

Tel no. : (852) 3509 8920
Fax no. : (852) 2136 3282

30 December 2019

Clerk to LegCo Panel on Food Safety and
Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn.: Ms Josephine SO)
(Fax: 2509 9055)

Dear Ms So,

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Letter from Prof Hon Joseph LEE

Thank you for your letter of 16 December enclosing a letter from Prof Hon Joseph LEE about a recent incident of a Vietnam meat processing plant using forged health certificates to import frozen pork from Vietnam to Hong Kong.

The Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (CFS) has taken swift actions in respect of the above-mentioned incident to control the situation and minimise its impact. CFS has given a detailed account of the incident, as well as the actions that they have been taken in the attached note for members' information.

CFS will monitor the incident closely and continue to carry out appropriate follow up actions in collaboration with the Vietnamese authority.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Teresa Cheung', written in a cursive style.

(Ms Teresa CHEUNG)
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c. Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
(Attn: (1) Dr Y Y HO
(2) Dr Edwin TSUI)

Recent Incident of Using Forged Vietnam Health Certificates to Import Frozen Pork

The Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (CFS) discovered in early November this year, when processing the food import data of the information technology (IT) system set up to strengthen food import control, that there were some discrepancies in the serial numbers of a few health certificates issued by the Vietnamese authority. CFS immediately alerted the Vietnamese authority, which confirmed with CFS on 12 December that eight health certificates that were all used by a Vietnam meat processing plant were forged documents that bore high level of resemblance to the authentic ones. CFS immediately took a series of measures and follow-up actions after the occurrence of the incident, details of which are reported below.

Discovery of Vietnam forged health certificates

2. To improve the food import control and quarantine procedures, CFS is now conducting an exercise to gradually set up its information system on food import. When processing the data of health certificates in early November, some discrepancies were found in the serial numbers of a few health certificates issued by the Vietnamese authority. CFS immediately informed the Consulate General of Vietnam in Hong Kong for follow-up verification and investigation. The Vietnamese authority informed CFS on 12 December 2019 that eight health certificates that were used for the importation of frozen pork were forged and the importer for all of the forged health certificates were the same Vietnam meat processing plant. The Vietnamese authority has already stopped issuance of health certificate to the plant in question after the incident.

3. This is the first time that CFS discovered forged Vietnam health certificates. The forged health certificates, which indicated issuance from the competent authority, were in a format and had a seal that was recognised by FEHD, and bore high level of resemblance to the authentic ones.

4. Frozen pork weighing about 176 tonnes were imported into Hong Kong using the forged health certificates. They came from the Vietnam meat

processing plant concerned and were imported by three local importers between May and October this year, representing 0.2% of all frozen pork imported during the period.

Follow-up actions

5. Upon receipt of notification from the Vietnamese authority on 12 December 2019, CFS immediately reported the case to the Police, requested the Vietnamese authority to conduct an in-depth investigation into the incident and demanded the Vietnamese authority to provide the results of the investigation to CFS as soon as possible to prevent similar incidents from recurring in future. At the same time, CFS suspended the import of frozen pork from the plant in question, instructed the three importers to suspend sale and initiated a recall of the concerned products on the same day. A press release was also issued to announce the incident. In addition, CFS immediately started to step up testing on frozen pork imported from Vietnam and enhanced the inspection of health certificates for Vietnam meat. Details are as follows-

Recall and suspension of import from the processing plant concerned

6. CFS instructed the three local importers to suspend sale and initiated a recall of frozen pork of the concerned consignments on the same day upon receipt of confirmation from the Vietnamese authority. Moreover, CFS requested the three importers to set up a hotline for enquiries from traders, as well as to immediately suspend the import of frozen pork from the Vietnam meat processing plant concerned. CFS discovered, after investigation, that the concerned consignments of frozen pork had already been distributed to other food premises, mainly food factories, and had all been sold without any stock left. The consignments concerned were whole pigs (medium pigs), which are normally supplied to food factories for use as roasted meat.

Enhanced testing

7. From 12 December onwards, CFS has enhanced the testing of frozen pork from Vietnam and samples were taken at various levels. As at 30 December, a total of 48 samples of frozen pork imported from Vietnam have been taken for

testing. Results of all the products tested were satisfactory.

8. To ensure food for sale in Hong Kong is compliant with local regulations and fit for human consumption, the CFS has, through the Food Surveillance Programme, collected food samples from import, wholesale and retail levels (including pork, beef, poultry meat and its products) for chemical and biological testing. CFS has not discovered any unsatisfactory samples of frozen meat imported from Vietnam under the routine Food Surveillance Programme. From January 2018 to November 2019, CFS has collected more than 10 700 samples of pork, beef, poultry meat and its products for testing and the satisfactory rate is 99.8%. The 25 unsatisfactory samples did not involve frozen meat from Vietnam.

Enhancing inspection of health certificates

9. Since the onset of the incident in early November, CFS has taken swift actions to control the situation and minimise its impact. These included introducing an extra precautionary measure to pass each and every Vietnam health certificate to the Vietnamese authority for dual verification on top of CFS's routine checking before issue of import licenses. This arrangement has been implemented with full co-operation from the Vietnamese authority and no discrepancies in the serial numbers of health certificates have been found since. We will continue with the dual verification arrangement.

10. Currently, Hong Kong and Vietnam have only established import protocol for frozen pork. The Vietnamese authority expressed that they had all along been conducting regular, strict inspections on the processing plant in question to ensure satisfactory sanitary condition and that its processed meat is fit for human consumption. Since the incident was uncovered, the Vietnamese authority has suspended the issuance of health certificates to the processing plant.

11. Given the above situation, we have initiated targeted suspension of sale and recall in respect of the incident. This, coupled with the above-mentioned dual verification arrangement, can effectively curb the import of frozen pork by the use of forged health certificates. CFS will keep close collaboration with the Vietnamese authority and the Police to follow up on the matter and take appropriate actions.

Way Forward

12. In view of the incident, CFS will maintain close liaison with the Vietnamese authority and immediately start discussions on a series of improvement measures to enhance the verification of the authenticity of health certificates. These measures include upgrading the IT system, optimising the verification mechanism of the relevant application documents, and requesting the Vietnamese authority to provide more information on its official website to curb the use of forged health certificates.

**Centre for Food Safety,
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
December 2019**