

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Summary of Recent Food Incidents

Targeted food surveillance on formaldehyde in noodlefish

The CFS conducted a targeted food surveillance in October 2008 to assess the state of formaldehyde in noodlefish. Ten samples of noodlefish were collected from retail outlets for testing. Results showed that five samples contained formaldehyde at levels ranging from 170 to 570 ppm.

2. It was believed that the formaldehyde was added as a preservative after the fish were caught, or during transportation or storage. Under existing legislation, formaldehyde was not permitted for use as a food preservative.

3. At the levels of formaldehyde detected in the noodlefish samples, it was unlikely to cause adverse health effect upon normal consumption, but for the sample with highest detected level of formaldehyde, consumption on a long-term basis for high consumers could result in increased health risk, such as gastro-intestinal upset.

4. Regarding the unsatisfactory samples, the CFS issued warning letters to the shop and stall operators concerned requesting them to stop selling the affected products. A press release was issued to inform the public of the surveillance results.

Seasonal food surveillance on hairy crabs

5. From August to October 2008, the CFS conducted a seasonal food surveillance project on hairy crabs for chemical and microbiological analysis. A total of 69 samples of hairy crabs were collected at import, wholesale and retail levels. The microbiological tests covered parasites.

The chemical tests included metallic contamination, synthetic hormones, colouring matters and veterinary drug residues. All test results were satisfactory.

6. A press release on the surveillance results was issued and relevant advice on food safety was provided to the public.

Seasonal food surveillance on buffet food and "poon choi"

7. The CFS conducted from September to December 2008 a seasonal food surveillance project on buffet food and "poon choi". The Centre collected 304 samples of buffet food, including seafood, salad, cold dishes, sushi and sashimi, and 22 samples of "poon choi" for microbiological tests, including those for pathogens *Bacillus cereus*, *Salmonella* and *Staphylococcus aureus*. All the buffet food samples and 20 "poon choi" samples were found to be satisfactory.

8. Of the two unsatisfactory "poon choi" samples, one was found to contain *Bacillus cereus* at a level of 3.7 million per gramme. The other was detected with *Staphylococcus aureus* at a level of eight million per gramme. The detection of pathogens at these levels in food samples could be indications of unsatisfactory hygiene conditions during food processing and production.

9. Regarding the unsatisfactory food samples, the CFS took follow-up actions, including issuing warning letters to the operators concerned, stepping up inspection of the concerned premises and taking further samples for testing. The surveillance results were announced to the public.

Food incident on dioxin contamination in Irish pork and bacon products

10. In early December 2008, the Irish government announced the detection of dioxins in animal feed and pork fat samples. According to the information of the Irish authorities, all Irish pork and bacon products produced since September 2008 were affected. The Irish government also required the food industry to recall the affected products from the market.

11. Regarding this incident, the CFS contacted relevant food authorities for further information and monitored the situation closely. The CFS also informed the trade of the incident. A press release was issued to advise the public not to eat pork and bacon products made in Ireland. It was subsequently confirmed that no affected products were supplied to Hong Kong.

Update on the incident of melamine in dairy products and other foodstuffs

12. Since the commencement of the third phase of the surveillance programme in mid-November 2008, the CFS has been focusing on testing of food groups previously found to contain melamine exceeding the legal standards, such as milk, biscuits, cakes, chocolate, candies, frozen confections and eggs. In the third phase, one egg sample was found to have failed the local legal standard.

13. As at 5 January 2009, a total of 4 936 food samples had been tested, with 40 samples found to contain melamine at levels exceeding the legal limits. Sale of all relevant products was stopped. The overall unsatisfactory rate was less than 1%. The CFS would continue to collect samples for testing and closely monitor the situation.

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