

Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Notes of Seventh Meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum held on
19 September 2007 at 10:00 am at Conference Hall, 3 Edinburgh Place, Central, Hong Kong

Present

Government Representatives

Dr Y. Y. HO	Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment & Communication)	(Chairman)
Dr. Anne FUNG	Principal Medical Officer (Risk Assessment & Communication)	
Miss Kay KB KWOK	Assistant Secretary for Food & Health (Food)2	
Miss Janny KM MA	Scientific Officer (Risk Assessment) 6	
Ms. Y S LEUNG	Superintendent (Import/Export) 2	
Mr. K. W. CHUNG	Chief Health Inspector (Food Labelling)	
Mr. H M WONG	Superintendent (Risk Communication)	(Notes-taker)

Trade Representatives

Mr. CHEUNG Yun Hei	A S Watson Industries
Mr. Peter JOHNSTON	A.S. Watson Group (HK) Ltd
Mr. MAN Kam Wing	Aeon Stores (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd.
Mr. Ricky K S PANG	Aeon Stores (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd.
Ms. Becky CHEUNG	Best Key Consultants
Ms. May KAN	Coca-Cola China Ltd
Ms. Joyce WONG	Dah Chong Hong Ltd.
Ms. Wendi S Y CHAN	Dah Chong Hong Ltd.
Ms. Kathie CHOI	Ferrero Asia Ltd
Mr. Freddy FONG	Foodscan Analytics Ltd
Mr. Albert TANG	Hong Kong Suppliers Assoc. Ltd
Ms. Eleanor CHAN	Hong Kong Suppliers Assoc. Ltd
Mr. Gary S M LO	Hong Kong Yakult Co. Ltd
Ms. NG Pui Kay	Kee Wah Bakery
Ms. Jessica CHUI	Kjeldsen & Co. (HK) Ltd
Mr. LAU Kin Wah	Kowloon Chamber of Commerce
Mr. LEE Kwong Lam	Kowloon Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Chelsea LI	Kraft Foods (China) Company Ltd.
Ms. Mona WONG	Lee Kum Kee Intl Holdings Ltd
Mr. Stephen CHOI	Lee Kum Kee Intl Holdings Ltd
Mr. Philip KWAN	Mead Johnson
Mr. SO Man Lam	Mengniu Milk Industry (H.K) Ltd
Mr. Joseph W S MA	Nestle Hong Kong Ltd

Mr. Jonathan CHOW	Nikken's Japanese Food Co., Ltd
Mr. LAM Tsz Mau	Nissin Foods Co., Ltd
Ms. LAI Sin Man	Parknshop
Mr. CHAN Wing Cheong	Pat Chun International Ltd
Mr. NG Kwok Wing	Robiff International Limited
Ms. Amy YIP	Sims Trading Co. Ltd.
Mr. Raymond CHENG	Swire Coca-Cola HK Ltd
Mr. WONG Kam Chuen	Swire Coca-Cola HK Ltd
Mr. HO Kwok Ying	The Asia Provisions Co Ltd
Mr. Allen HO	The Dairy Farm Group
Mr. Leslie P Y WONG	The Hong Kong Food Council Ltd
Mr. Albert YAN	Unilever Hong Kong Ltd
Mr. Ivan CHAN	Vitasoy Intl Holdings Ltd
Mr. Marco WONG	Vitasoy Intl Holdings Ltd
Ms. Patricia LEUNG	Wellcome
Ms. LIU So Fan	YHS Hong Kong (2000) Pte Ltd

Opening Remarks

1. The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Government Representatives attending the forum.

Agenda Item 1

Confirmation of the notes of last meeting

2. The notes of last meeting were confirmed without amendments.

Agenda Item 2

Pre-statutory Voluntary Enrolment/Notification Scheme for Food Importers and Distributors

3. Ms Y S LEUNG introduced the Pre-Statutory Voluntary Notification Scheme for Food Importers and Distributors (the Notification Scheme) to the meeting. A voluntary enrolment scheme for poultry egg importers and distributors was launched by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) in December 2006, while the Notification Scheme has been extended to game, meat, poultry meat, milk, frozen confection, vegetables, fruits, fish and other types of food by phases as from August 2007. The Government was planning to formulate new legislation on food safety. Before its enactment, the Imported Game, Meat and Poultry Regulations would be amended to introduce mandatory notification/registration for importers and distributors of game, meat, poultry and its eggs. The legislative amendment was expected to be tabled to the Legislative Council for consideration by the end of 2007. Through the Notification Scheme, it was hoped that a comprehensive database of all food importers and distributors would be created to enhance the traceability of imported food so that the CFS can inform the relevant parties and obtain their support and co-operation in the event of food incidents. The existing voluntary enrolment / notification scheme was on a voluntary basis. Importers and distributors were urged to notify the CFS of their business and keep records of import and distribution properly. With their consent, lists of importers and distributors would be uploaded onto the CFS website for information of the public and the trade.

4. A trade representative enquired whether there would be any fees for Pre-Statutory Voluntary Notification Scheme and suggested that low or no fees be charged.

5. Ms Y S LEUNG replied that no fees were required for the current Notification Scheme.

6. Another trade representative opposed to any fees for the trade as this would increase their cost.
7. The Chairman responded that the Government would consider the suggestions when deciding if there would be any fees.
8. Some trade representatives questioned whether the Notification Scheme was a duplicate as the import of food poultry and milk products were already governed by the relevant ordinances.
9. Ms Y S LEUNG replied that the information required in the Imported Game, Meat and Poultry Regulations did not include the particulars of distributors/wholesalers. The Notification Scheme could further enable the CFS to have more information to cope with the food incidents.
10. Another trade representative enquired how long the record should be kept and what should be included.
11. Ms Y S LEUNG responded that importers/distributors should keep invoices until the shelf-life of the food expired. The CFS would conduct wide consultation to balance the needs of all parties before the legislation was introduced.
12. A trade representative proposed that the CFS worked with the Business Registration Office (BRO) to reduce duplicated work of the food trade.
13. Ms Y S LEUNG responded that the BRO did not have sufficient information on the food importers for the CFS to trace the problematic food.
14. Another trade representative said that companies would determine the appropriate level of traceability after assessing the risk of their products and asked if the Government would assess such process. The Chairman remarked that the Notification Scheme at this stage was on a voluntary basis and would become mandatory only after the trade were widely consulted over the details of the implementation.

Agenda Item 3
Dietary Exposure to Benzoic Acid from Prepackaged Non-alcoholic Beverages of Secondary School Students

15. Ms Janny MA presented the newly-completed risk assessment study entitled “Dietary Exposure to Benzoic Acid from Prepackaged Non-alcoholic Beverages of Secondary School Students” to the meeting. Benzoic acid was a common preservative widely used in food, cosmetics and drugs. The Preservatives in Food Regulations (Cap 132BD) under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance stipulated that it could be added to specified food as preservative. The study showed that both the average and high consumers of the secondary school students were unlikely to experience adverse health effects of benzoic acid. However, high consumers who constantly indulged in beverages with high benzoic acid content under the worst-case scenario might have health risk. The CFS advised food manufacturers to prepare their food in accordance with the Good Manufacturing Practices and not to abuse food additives. Besides, the public should maintain a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive exposure of benzoic acid from eating a small range of food items.
16. A trade representative enquired about the access to the risk assessment study.
17. The Chairman responded that the study would be uploaded onto the CFS website.

Agenda Item 4

Regulation of Red 2G

18. Ms Janny MA briefed the meeting on the regulation of Red 2G. The European Food Safety Authority considered that Red 2G posed food safety concern in the light of the latest scientific evidence on the carcinogenic potential of its metabolite aniline. In response to this, the European Commission had suspended the use of Red 2 in food since 28 July 2007. The Codex Alimentarius Commission had not established any food safety standards for Red 2G and it was not allowed to be used in food as colouring matter in many countries. Locally, Red 2G was a permitted colouring matter under the Colouring Matter in Food Regulations (Cap 132H) of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance. However, owing to the latest scientific findings and the availability of substitutes, the CFS would remove Red 2G from Part I of the First Schedule of the Colouring Matter in Food Regulations as a precautionary measure on the recommendation of the Expert Committee on Food Safety.

19. The Chairman advised the trade to stop using Red 2G as soon as possible. The Government would consider granting of an appropriate grace period when there was legislative amendment.

20. A trade representative suggested that importers of Red 2G be informed of the proposed legislative amendment.

21. The Chairman said that the CFS would consider taking appropriate follow-up action if the relevant information of these importers was available.

22. Another trade representative suggested that the importers and manufacturers be informed by post or through Rapid Alert System.

23. The Chairman replied that the trade would be informed through all appropriate channels.

24. Another trade representative also suggested that countries exporting food to Hong Kong be informed of the proposal.

25. The Chairman replied that members of the World Trade Organization would be informed of the legislative amendment in advance.

Agenda Item 5

Rapid Alert System

26. Dr Anne FUNG briefed the meeting on the pilot scheme of Rapid Alert System. She explained that CFS officers closely monitored overseas and local food incidents, analysed food hazards and assessed the risks everyday with a view to delivering messages to the public timely and effectively through different channels to minimize the health risks. Under the System, the trade would receive information on food incidents quickly by e-mail, fax or mobile phone in the form of SMS message so that they could take appropriate follow-up action. She urged the trade to register with the System by completing and returning the registration form distributed at the forum.

27. A trade representative said that he had received a call from a person claiming to be an officer of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and requesting him to stop selling a certain type of food in response to a food incident. However, when he checked it with the FEHD, he was told that no similar calls were made. He hoped that advice on the action taken by the trade and contact number could be included when important information was sent so that the trade could approach the CFS officers in charge for further details.

(Post-meeting Note: CFS had already given a reply to the trade representative by e-mail in response to his earlier enquiry made to FEHD about the food incident mentioned.)

28. Dr Anne FUNG replied that the information disseminated would include: (1) a summary of the incident; (2) description of the food; (3) the advice to the trade; and (4) hotline.

Agenda Item 6

The Guidelines on Identification and Labelling of Oilfish/Cod

29. Mr H M WONG presented the above Guidelines to the meeting. In response to the “oilfish” incident in early 2007, a Working Group was set up by the CFS, comprising representatives from government departments, the trade and consumer group as well as academics, to advise the trade in the appropriate naming and labelling of “oilfish” and “cod”. The Guidelines was prepared in August. To facilitate a better understanding on it by the trade, a trade briefing was held in the Hong Kong Central Library on 16 August. Of the 50 000 copies produced, some 30 000 copies had been distributed to all importers, wholesalers and retailers (including restaurants) of the fish trade since then. He told the meeting that the recommendations on the naming, identification and labelling of “oilfish” and “cod” were set out in the Guidelines.

30. A trade representative said that some importers could not provide the scientific names of the fish.

31. The Chairman replied that the trade should ask importers to provide the Latin names of the fish.

32. A trade representative suggested a ban on the sale of oilfish and its products.

33. The Chairman replied that only two countries banned the sale of oilfish for the time being. After discussion, the Working Group considered such ban unnecessary but thought that appropriate advice on its labelling was needed.

Agenda Item 7

Any Other Business

34. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Technical Meeting on Nutrition Labelling would be held shortly and the trade would be invited to it in due course.

35. A trade representative suggested that the Government should allow the use of “or” on ingredient list as some seasonal ingredients may be replaced by substitutes.

36. Mr K W CHUNG responded that according to the law, the ingredients should be listed in descending order of weight or volume when the food was prepackaged. The use of “or” was not acceptable after legal advice was sought.

37. The Chairman asked the trade representative to provide their legal opinion on the above issue for further consideration of the administration.

There being no other business. The meeting was adjourned at 12 pm.