

Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Notes of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum
held on 17 April 2009 at 2:40 p.m.
in Conference Room at Room 102, 1/F, 258 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

Present

Government Representatives

Dr. Y. Y. HO	Consultant (Community Medicine) (Chairman) (Risk Assessment & Communication)
Dr. Anne FUNG	Principal Medical Officer (Risk Assessment & Communication)
Miss Katherine JUE	Senior Administrative Officer (Centre for Food Safety)2
Mr. P. W. NG	Superintendent (Food Surveillance)1
Mr. K. T. TAM	Superintendent (Import/Export)1
Ms. Waiky WONG	Scientific Officer (Total Diet Study)
Ms. Melva CHEN	Scientific Officer (Chemical)
Mr. Nicky HO	Scientific Officer (Programme Planning)2
Mr. H. M. WONG	Superintendent (Risk Communication) (Notes-taker)

Trade Representatives

Ms. Kennase Chow	Aeon Stores (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd
Ms. Janice WONG	Aeon Stores (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd
Mr. Garick CHAU	Chewy International Foods Ltd.
Ms. TSANG Yuk ping	China Resources Vanguard (H.K) Ltd
Mr. Simon WONG	Chinese Cuisine Management Association
Ms. Pandora SO	CIRCLE K Convenience Store
Mr. Marco KWOK	City Super Ltd
Mr. K.C. WONG	Coca-Cola China Ltd
Ms. May KAN	Coca-Cola China Ltd
Mr. SAM CHAN	Dah Chong Hong Ltd
Ms. Emily LAM	Dah Chong Hong Ltd
Ms. CHING Yim hing	Favour Capital
Mr. LU Jian-yu	Federation of Hong Kong Industries
Mr. CHOI Lee-tat	Food Safety Services International

Ms. Vackie LIN	Glaxo Smithhkkline Ltd
Mr. LOCK Kwok on	HKFORT
Mr. Jerry CHONG	HKFORT
Mr. Ricky CHOI	HKFORT
Mr. WONG Chi lung	Hong Kong Ham Holdings Limited
Ms. TANG Lai ho	Hong Kong Ham Holdings Limited
Mr. LEE Kwong lam	Kowloon Chamber of Commerce
Mr. LEUNG Kam tong	Kowloon Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Kate NG	Lucullus Food and Wines Co. Ltd
Mr. CHOW Chi yan, Jonathan	Nikken's Japanese Food Co., Ltd
Mr. HUI Yiu kai	Nissin Foods Co., Ltd
Mr. LAM Tsz mau	Nissin Foods Co., Ltd
Ms. Cactus LAI	Parknshop
Ms. Mabel LEUNG	Parknshop
Ms. Stephanie SHUM	Saint Honore Cake Shop Ltd
Ms. LO Cheuk Ting	Seven Eleven
Ms. HO Yuk sim	The Association for H.K. Catering Services Management
Mr. Allen PANG	The Chinese Manufacturers Association of Hong Kong
Mr. Allen HO	The Dairy Farm Group
Mr. WONG Yip tong, Justin	The Dairy Farm Group
Mr. Samuel CHAN	The Garden Co. Ltd
Mr. CHAN Chi wai	The Garden Co. Ltd
Ms. Frenas S.L.WONG	The Kowloon Dairy Ltd
Ms. LAW Sui ling	The Wing On Department Stores Limited
Mr. WONG Yiu kau	UNY (HK) Co. Ltd
Mr. CHAN Chi kong	Vitasoy International Holdings Ltd
Ms. LAM Siu ping	Winner Food Products Ltd
Mr. Philip KWAN	Lee Kam Kee
Ms. WONG Wai ying	Imperial Bird's West International Co., Ltd
Ms. CHAN Lai hang	Griffith Laboratories Ltd

Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all trade representatives to the meeting and introduced Government Representatives to the meeting.

Confirmation of the Notes of Last Meeting

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

Agenda Item 1

Matters Arising from Notes of Last Meeting

Amendment to the Chinese Rendition of “use by” Date on Labels of Prepackaged Foods

3. Mr. P. W. NG said that, after considering the views received at the last Trade Consultation Forum, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) decided to advance the date of publishing the commencement notice for the captioned amendment in the Gazette to mid-May 2009, whereas the effective date of the amendment would remain to be 1 July 2010. The advancement would offer more time for the food trade to prepare new labels for the amended Chinese rendition of “use by” date. FEHD would formally notify the food trade in writing of the advancement of the date for publishing the commencement notice in May 2009.

4. Trade representatives welcomed the decision and thanked for advancing the date of publishing the commencement notice.

5. A trade representative asked whether there were options for the Chinese rendition to be printed on labels such as shortening the Chinese rendition to four Chinese characters, for example “保質期至”, as there were lots of information to be printed on labels of prepackaged foods. It was difficult to include two more Chinese characters under the amended Chinese rendition. The Chairman said that the amendment was a technical revision intending to better reflect the legislative intent and to tie in with the Chinese translation of “use by” date. The amendment was already passed by the Legislative Council on 30 April 2008 and published in the Gazette on 9 May 2008. Therefore, there was no room to manoeuvre as far as the content of the proposed amendment was concerned. The food trade was, however, consulted on the commencement notice and its implementation. Besides, the legislation did not provide a shortened Chinese rendition. It was not practicable from law enforcement point to accept wordings in the Chinese rendition that were not provided by the legislation.

Agenda Item 2

Risk Assessment Study on Aluminium in Food

6. Ms. Waiky WONG briefed the meeting about the main findings on the risk assessment (RA) study on aluminium (Al) in food. She said that the RA study aimed at examining the levels of Al in various food products which had been reported to contain high level of Al due to the

use of Al-containing food additives, estimating the potential dietary exposure to Al of the population in Hong Kong and examining the local situation of Al content in soya milk powder including soya-based formula.

7. Ms. Waiky WONG said that the RA study revealed that Al-containing food additives were widely used in the production of steamed bread/bun/cake, bakery products such as muffin, pancake/waffle, coconut tart and cake, jellyfish but the general public was unlikely to experience major undesirable health effects of Al. However, the potential health risk of Al for some population sub-groups, particularly those who regularly consumed foods added with Al-containing food additives such as steamed bread/bun/cake, bakery products and jellyfish, could not be ruled out. The public should maintain a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive exposure to Al from a small range of food items, particularly jellyfish, steamed cakes and muffins, and make reference to the information on the ingredient list on the label to make informed food choices. The trade should reduce the use of Al-containing food additives in preparing food or replace them with other alternatives as far as possible. Information on label including specific food additives used should be accurate. The trade should also develop alternative techniques to reduce the use of Al-containing food additives during food processing. A Working Group on the Use of Al-containing Food Additives consisting of members from the trade and academia would be formed to devise a set of guidelines on the use of Al-containing food additives for reference of the food trade.

8. The Chairman said that the RA study would be released in mid-May 2009 by means of a press conference. The media would also be told about the formation of a working group with the food trade to devise measures to reduce Al in products and to prepare guidelines for assisting the trade in reducing the Al levels in products. In light that the Codex standard would be under review, the Chairman said that the international developments on standard setting would be closely followed-up. In the meantime, the trade should follow the Guidelines where appropriate for reducing the Al content in their products.

9. Trade representatives commented that jellyfish consumed in Hong Kong was imported from the Mainland. The food trade in the Mainland should be informed of the RA study for consideration in taking parallel action to control Al in food. The Chairman said that the Mainland was also looking at the issue.

10. Trade representatives commented that baking powder with Al-containing food additives was basic ingredient for bakery production. Alternative Al-free baking powders should be identified and recommended for the bakeries to consider. Ms. Waiky WONG said that there were Al-free baking powders in the market but these might be higher in price. The

Chairman suggested Ms. Waiky WONG collecting information about Al-free baking powders for the working group to consider.

11. The Chairman invited again trade representatives to enroll to the working group for concerted efforts in preparing guidelines on the use of Al in food. The first meeting of the working group would be held on 21 April 2009.

Agenda Item 3

Polybrominated diphenyl ethers in Food of Animal Origin

12. Ms. Melva CHEN briefed the meeting on a RA study of Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) in food of animal origin. PBDEs were widely used in plastic products, polyurethane foam and carpet as flame retardant. The three main commercial PBDE products were Pentabromodiphenyl ether, Octabromodiphenyl ether and Decabromodiphenyl ether. PBDEs existed commonly in the environment and did not decompose easily. PBDEs could accumulate in the body of living creature, especially in animal fats and was potentially toxic. Foreign studies revealed that the levels of PBDE in human blood, body tissue and breast milk were increasing rapidly. PBDEs could be taken from indoor air, domestic dust and food (including breast milk). Animal studies found that PBDEs affected brain and reproductive organs, neurobehavioural development, thyroxine level and were toxic to liver. However, the Joint Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations/World Health Organization Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) pointed out that, for the more toxic PBDE congeners, adverse effects would unlikely occur in laboratory animals at doses of less than approximately 100 microgram per kilogram of body weight per day.

13. Ms. Melva CHEN continued that the use of PBDEs was already regulated in some countries / areas such as the European Union, Australia and some states in the United States of America. In Hong Kong, PBDEs were added to the list of toxic substances monitored in marine sediment by the Environmental Protection Department. However, there was no local or international regulatory standard on PBDE in food. PBDE contamination could be caused by e-wastes and production of brominated fire retardants. One earlier research indicated that the level of PBDEs in seafood of Hong Kong and in the water environment of Pearl Delta was relatively higher than other countries. As there was no local data on the dietary exposure to PBDEs, it was difficult to assess the risk of PBDE to Hong Kong citizens. Ms Melva CHEN said that the RA study aimed to measure the levels of PBDEs in food of animal origin, to estimate the potential dietary exposure to PBDEs of secondary school students in Hong Kong from these foods and to assess the associated health risks.

14. Ms. Melva CHEN told the meeting that all food samples tested in the study contained PBDEs but the levels varied greatly. The levels of PBDEs in local food were comparable to those reported in some other countries. It was noted that the total PBDE concentrations in fish were significantly higher than those of other food groups. Fish was the main dietary source of PBDEs of secondary students, which represented 38.5%. The dietary exposures to PBDEs from food of animal origin for the average and high consumers of secondary school students were estimated to be 0.0026 and 0.0064 microgram per kilogram of body weight per day respectively, which were far below any adverse effect dose observed in laboratory animals. In view of the finding, the potential risk of PBDEs leading to health and food safety problems among the public was considered low. Nevertheless, the trade should adopt good farming and manufacturing practice such as preventing animals from contacting with polyurethane foam, insulator and other materials containing PBDEs, purchasing food from reliable suppliers and keeping records on source of supply properly for retrieval when in need. The general public should maintain a balanced diet to avoid excessive exposure to chemical contaminants from a small range of food items. As PBDEs tended to accumulate in fat, the public should consume low fat food, discard fat from meat and meat product, reduce the use of food made from animal fat and adopt low fat cooking methods.

15. The Chairman said that the RA study would be uploaded to Centre for Food Safety (CFS) website in late April / early May 2009. The media would be informed of the study by means of a press release.

Agenda Item 4

Food Safety of Instant Cup Noodle Containers

16. Ms. Melva CHEN briefed the meeting on a RA study of the food safety of instant cup noodle containers. In the RA study, cup containers of instant noodles were collected from the market for the study. Although there were many varieties of instant noodle products, the packaging materials were mainly of polystyrene (PS), polyethylene (PE) coated paper, polypropylene whereas lids of containers were made from PS / PE copolymers film. PS was non-toxic but a small amount of styrene monomer might remain in the end product during the process of polymerisation and the residues could be migrated to the food. Studies showed styrene monomer might suppress the central nervous system. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) considered styrene as possibly carcinogenic to humans. The provisional maximum tolerable daily intake of styrene was 0.04 milligram per kilogram bodyweight. If technically feasible, styrene in food should be

reduced to the minimum.

17. Ms. Melva CHEN continued that heavy metal impurities might also be migrated to food when plastic materials came into contact with food. The migration affected food safety such as the excessive intake of lead might harm the kidney, cardiovascular system, immune system, blood producing organs, central nervous system and reproductive system. IARC held the view that inorganic lead might cause cancer to humans. JECFA determined that the provisional tolerable weekly intake of lead was 0.025 milligram per kilogram bodyweight.

18. Ms. Melva CHEN said that polyurethane (PU) was an adhesive material. It might be deployed to produce the copolymers film used in heat-sealable lid. The diaminotoluene used to produce PU that had not reacted might reside on the film. Animal in experiment fed with diaminotoluene would suffer from toxication in kidney. IARC classified one of the diaminotoluene isomer (2,4-diaminotoluene) as possible carcinogenic to human. Other substances such as additives, impurities, reaction product and decomposed product might also be migrated from the contact or non-contact surface of instant noodle cup container to food.

19. Ms. Melva CHAN said that there was no specific legislation in Hong Kong to regulate the use of food packaging materials. However, the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap.132) stipulates that all food offered for sale in Hong Kong must be fit for human consumption. Should the food be rendered unfit for human consumption due to a problematic container, it would be an offence to offer such food for sale.

20. Ms. Melva CHEN told the meeting that the RA study found that all instant cup noodle containers tested complied with the standards for total migration and styrene monomer set by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) as well as heavy metals and diaminotoluene set by the Mainland. When used properly, the containers would not cause food safety problem. Nevertheless, the trade was advised to purchase containers from manufacturers adopting good manufacturing practice, select safe and suitable containers for the function and describe clearly the instruction of preparing the noodle for consumption on package and warnings. On the other hand, the public should follow the instruction when preparing the noodle for consumption and should not fill up damaged or distorted container with boiling water to prepare the noodle.

21. A trade representative suggested that the Mainland standard instead of the USFDA's should be adopted for testing the instant noodle cup containers as they were manufactured in and imported from the Mainland. The Chairman said that the widely recognised

international standard such as USFDA's had been adopted in testing. When there was no such standard, other standards, including the Mainland's, would be considered. In the absence of US standards, Mainland standards were adopted for some of the parameters in the study. He added that the containers tested came from a number of countries.

22. The Chairman said that the RA study would be uploaded to CFS website in early May 2009. The media would be informed of the study by means of a press release.

Agenda Item 5

Any Other Business

Food Safety Charter 2009

23. Mr. Nicky HO briefed the meeting on the draft plan of the Food Safety Charter 2009. As a matter of background, the CFS conducted a mass publicity campaign to promote the 5 Keys to Food Safety (5 Keys) in 2008 which included:

- a) Choose – Choose safe raw materials;
- b) Clean – Keep hands and utensils clean;
- c) Separate – Separate raw and cooked food;
- d) Cook – Cook thoroughly; and
- e) Safe Temperature – Keep food at safe temperature.

24. The Food Safety Charter 2008 was a highlight of the Campaign aiming to solicit support of the food trade to join hands with the CFS to promote 5 Keys with a view to building Hong Kong a food safe city.

25. Dr. Anne FUNG said that over 20 food trade associations and 1,600 licensed food premises/supermarkets/convenient stores signed the Food Safety Charter 2008. Representatives of food trade associations and licensed food premises were invited to the Food Safety Charter signing ceremony held on 3 July 2008. Building on the experience of the Charter in 2008, it was planned to invite members of the food trade to sign up to the Charter again in 2009 to solicit their support to undertake joint efforts with the CFS to promote the 5 Keys to their staff, members and customers. She invited the food trade to provide their views on the draft plan.

26. Mr. Nicky HO said that signatories in the Food Safety Charter 2009 were obliged to disseminate the messages of 5 Keys to their staff, members or clients, set a good example for

the food trade so as to help build a food safe city, and build a good image of the signatories. They would be committed to undertake between July 2009 and June 2010 the following activities:

- a) display Food Safety Charter in their food premises;
- b) provide training to staff on 5 Keys; and
- c) display any of the 5 Keys publicity materials in their food premises.

27. Mr. Nicky HO introduced to the meeting the time schedule of the activities of the Food Safety Charter 2009 and continued that signatories of the Food Safety Charter 2009 would be entitled to the following benefits:

- a) listed in the designated “Food Safety Charter” webpage of CFS with the name, district and major type of cuisine served, and the webpage will have a more user-friendly search function;
- b) provided with a Charter for display in the respective premises to help build a positive image of the signatories in ensuring food safety;
- c) provided with more tailor-made publicity materials (e.g. plastic stickers, toothpick holder, plastic menu holder, etc.) and a toolkit to facilitate the promotion of 5 Keys;
- d) invited to attend the food safety seminars organised by CFS between July and December 2009;
- e) representatives of participated food trade associations will be invited to the Presentation Ceremony in the Food Safety Seminar for Trade to be held in September 2009;
- f) a signatory list will be displayed in the roving exhibitions and a computer will be available in the exhibition venues to facilitate the public to identify the signatories near their homes or workplaces; and
- g) personal delivery of the Charter, toolkits and publicity materials to the signatories.

28. Mr. Nicky HO said that, similar to the Food Safety Charter 2008, all licensed food premises and members of the food trade associations would be invited to sign up to the Charter. However, in order to ensure that a good image could be built among signatories, it was proposed that food premises would not be accepted as signatories if they had history of the following incidents in the past one year:

- a) suspension of licence under the Demerits Point System of FEHD;
- b) suspension of licence because licensing conditions are breached;
- c) closure of food premises ordered by FEHD; and
- d) food poisoning cases in the food premises and investigated by FEHD.

29. The Chairman asked trade representatives for their views on criteria of not accepting as signatory and the additional benefits offered to signatories:

- a) search function of web site;
- b) Charter certificate;
- c) publicity materials;
- d) delivery of publicity materials to signatories; and
- e) wordings on publicity materials.

30. Trade representatives suggested that, apart from apron, menu stand and toothpick, badge printed with the Chinese rendition of “Food Safety Charter” for staff of signatories to wear, tools such as food thermometer and timer for use in kitchen, tissue pack for distribution to customers, etc. might also be considered for the purpose of the publicity on the Charter. They also suggested other publicity channels, like collaborating with the Labour Department at the latter’s employment exhibition, website for gourmet such as “openrice.com”.

31. In response to views of trade representatives, Dr. Anne FUNG said that a separate meeting would be considered to discuss with trade representatives in details on the arrangement for the Charter.

Seminar on Supplementary Information to Microbiological Guidelines for Ready-to-eat Food

32. The Chairman told the meeting that a Seminar on Supplementary Information to Microbiological Guidelines for Ready-to-eat Food would be held on 24 April 2009 at the Hong Kong Science Museum and invited trade representatives to enroll to this seminar.

Regional Symposium on Regulation of Pesticide Residues in Food

33. The Chairman informed the meeting that the presentations, including sound tracks, of the one and half days’ Regional Symposium on Regulation of Pesticide Residues in Food organised jointly by the CFS and the European Commission had been uploaded on the CFS website for reference of the public.

Date of Next Meeting

34. The next meeting would be held on 22 May 2009.

35. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.