

CFS finds suspected forged health certificates

â€‹The Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (CFS) has earlier found some discrepancies of the serial numbers of a few health certificates issued by the Vietnamese authorities when processing data during an improvement exercise of the import food information system. The Centre immediately informed the Consulate General of Vietnam in Hong Kong for a follow-up investigation. CFS today (December 12) announced a case of suspected forged health certificates used by a Vietnam meat processing plant for application of import license of frozen pork to Hong Kong upon receiving a notification from the Vietnamese authorities. The Centre has immediately implemented tracing and follow up measures and referred the case to the Hong Kong Police Force for investigation.

The spokesman said, "After an investigation, the Vietnamese authorities informed the Centre today that after reviewing all health certificates submitted to CFS this year, there were a total of 8 forged health certificates identified. All forged health certificates were related to one meat processing plant in Vietnam. The Vietnamese authorities have suspended issuance of health certificate to this plant."

"The investigation of CFS revealed that from May to October this year, there were 8 consignments of frozen pork (weighed 176 tonnes) exported by the concerned meat plant, using high-quality forged health certificates, to 3 local importers. The CFS staff have issued 8 import licenses for meats to the 8 consignments of frozen pork, and later found out the abovementioned problem when processing data of the information system. All the 8 consignments of frozen pork were distributed to other food premises, such as food factories, and tracing work is ongoing. The concerned frozen porks were medium pigs and generally supplied to food factories for preparation of roasted meats."

The spokesman added that in view of the incident, the CFS has instructed the 3 importers to suspend sale and initiate a recall of the concerned products. The lot numbers of the 8 affected consignments of frozen pigs are 230819A6700, 110319A6765, 250419A6779, 220419A6780, 010819A6779, 090919A6700, 261218A6695 and 120819A6500. Trade members who had purchased the affected consignments can call the importers' hotlines, Wealth Fortune Trading Limited and Golden Rainbow Trading Limited at 5408 3322, and Keung Kee Food Trading Co. Ltd at 2694 1662, during office hours for enquiries about the recall. As a precautionary measure, the CFS has immediately suspended import of frozen pork from the Vietnam meat processing plant named "Haiphong Trading Goods Export Joint Stock Company" to Hong Kong. In the meantime, the CFS has enhanced inspection of all health certificates for imported frozen meat issued by Vietnam and will collaborate with the Vietnamese authorities to verify every health certificate submitted before issuance of import license. Currently, Hong Kong and Vietnam has established a meat import arrangement of frozen pork only.

To ensure food sold in Hong Kong is compliant to local regulations and fit for human consumption, the CFS has ongoing food surveillance programme in collecting food samples from import, wholesale and retail level (including pork, beef, poultry meat and its products) for chemical and biological testing. The CFS has collected more than 10 700 samples of pork, beef, poultry meat and its products since 2018 till November this year for chemical and biological testing (including residual veterinary drugs, preservatives and pathogen, etc.), the satisfactory rate was 99.8 per cent. The 25 unsatisfactory samples did not involve frozen meat from Vietnam.

The Vietnamese authorities expressed that they have been conducting regular strict inspections at the concerned processing plant to ensure its environment is clean and the processed meat is fit for human consumption. For the sake of prudence, the Centre will enhance testing of related products imported from Vietnam and CFS staff will take samples of frozen pork from Vietnam at various levels for testing starting from today.

This is the first time in Hong Kong to discover suspected forged health certificates involving the same processing plant in Vietnam. The CFS has requested the Vietnamese authorities to continue in-depth investigation of the incident and provide a prompt investigation results for prevention of future recurrence. The CFS will keep close collaboration with the Vietnamese authorities and the Hong Kong Police Force to follow up the matters and carry out appropriate actions. Investigation is still ongoing.

Given that no unsatisfactory samples of frozen meat imported from Vietnam were discovered under the routine food surveillance programme conducted by CFS, the Centre decided to initiate a confined recall for the abovementioned case.