

Fresh beef sample found to contain sulphur dioxide

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (October 22) that a fresh beef sample was found to contain sulphur dioxide, a preservative which is not permitted to be used in fresh meat. The CFS is following up on the case.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS took the abovementioned fresh beef sample from a stall in Kowloon City Market for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that the sample contained sulphur dioxide at a level of 12 parts per million."

According to the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap 132BD), it is an offence to add sulphur dioxide to fresh or chilled meat. The maximum penalty is a \$50,000 fine and six months' imprisonment.

The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the abovementioned irregularity. Should there be sufficient evidence, prosecution will be initiated.

Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative in a variety of foods including dried fruits, pickled vegetables and meat products such as sausages and grilled burgers, but under the regulation it is not permitted in fresh or chilled meat. Nonetheless, individual meat traders may illegally use sulphur dioxide to make meat look fresher. This preservative is of low toxicity. As it is water soluble, most of it can be removed through washing and cooking. However, susceptible individuals who are allergic to this preservative may experience breathing difficulties, headaches and nausea.

The spokesman reminded the food trade to comply with the law and not to sell fresh or chilled meat adulterated with sulphur dioxide. Members of the public should purchase meat from reliable market stalls or fresh provision shops. They should avoid buying or consuming meat which is unnaturally red, and maintain a balanced diet to avoid malnutrition or excessive exposure to chemicals from a small range of food items.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the case and take appropriate action.