

LCQ13: Tests on food products imported from Japan

Following is a question by the Hon JoePHY Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (April 10):

Question:

It has been reported that last month, the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety of Korea conducted radioactivity tests on a batch of candies from the Shizuoka Prefecture of Japan and found that each kilogram (kg) of the candies contained one becquerel (Bq) of caesium. Even though the radiation level was below the safety level of 100 Bq per kg, the Korean authorities still required the importer to conduct tests on that batch of candies for other radioactive substances, and the importer also cancelled the import of that batch of affected candies based on the test results. Some members of the public are worried that the 30-year-long nuclear wastewater discharge plan of the Japanese authorities will lead to the gradual accumulation of food safety risks for food products imported from Japan. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, in the light of the aforesaid situation, draw up a response plan for food products imported from Japan, such as increasing the number of tests and the items to be tested; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the number of samples of food products imported from Japan on which the authorities conducted tests for radioactive substance content in each month from February 2022 to February this year, together with a breakdown by test result (i.e. satisfactory and unsatisfactory); and

(3) whether it will tighten the food safety requirements for food products imported from Japan in the future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

A reply to the various parts of the Hon JoePHY Chan's question is provided as follows:

(1) In response to the report on Japanese candies exported to Korea from the Shizuoka Prefecture being found to contain one becquerel (Bq) of caesium per kilogram (kg) upon radioactivity tests, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department promptly enquired with the authorities of Korea and Japan on March 10, 2024 about the details of the

product in question and is awaiting their replies. According to the safety standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), the guideline level for caesium is 1 000 Bq per kg of food. During the three-month period prior to the abovementioned incident, the CFS took 54 samples of candies from Japan for radiation testing. Upon learning of the incident, the CFS immediately stepped up testing and took a total of 34 samples of Japanese candies for radiation testing from March 10 to 19. The results of all the said samples were satisfactory.

(2) The CFS took altogether about 63 000 samples of food imported from Japan for radiation testing between February 2022 and February 2024. All samples were found to be satisfactory. The relevant breakdown is at Annex. The number of samples taken is determined by the number of batches and quantity of the imported Japanese food and the risk-based surveillance strategy.

(3) In response to the unilateral decision of the Japanese Government to start discharging nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean from 24 August 2023, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order to prohibit the import of aquatic products from 10 metropolis/prefectures in Japan into Hong Kong. All aquatic products originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely, Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, are prohibited from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong if they are harvested, manufactured, processed or packed on or after August 24, 2023, including all live, chilled, frozen, dried or otherwise preserved aquatic products, sea salt, and unprocessed or processed seaweed. For other aquatic products, sea salt, and unprocessed or processed seaweed from Japan that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the CFS will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

Besides, since the accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station in 2011, import control measures have been maintained on certain food products from Japan. All vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk originating from Fukushima are banned from importing into Hong Kong while such foods originating from the four prefectures nearby Fukushima, namely, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma, are allowed to be imported on the condition that they are accompanied by a radiation certificate and an exporter certificate issued by the Japanese authority. Chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry and poultry eggs originating from the above five prefectures are allowed to be imported on the condition that they are accompanied with a radiation certificate issued by the Japanese authority which shows the radiation levels do not exceed the Codex guideline levels.

The CFS will continue to enhance the testing on imported Japanese food, and make adjustment to relevant surveillance in a timely manner with reference to the risk assessment results. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.