

Longer time for clearance of imported food from Japan at airport unrelated to radiation testing

A spokesman for the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department said today (September 16) that the CFS attaches great importance to recent reports about food products imported from Japan required longer time for clearance and has followed up immediately. Relevant information shows that the imported goods on that day increased 60 per cent comparing to normal, and a few cases required subsequent submission of supporting documents by the importers due to incompleteness on initial submission. Some cases required a longer processing time because the importers need to provide additional information to clarify discrepancies between the actual content of the consignment and corresponding documents. These situations were not related to radiation testing. In fact, even though more food was imported than usual, the average clearance time for most of the other food was about 3.5 hours.

In order to speed up clearance, the CFS has deployed seven extra staff members to provide support to ensure smooth operation. The CFS will continue to keep in view of the the situation, and suitably deploy and increase manpower to meet operational needs. Furthermore, the CFS will continue to communicate with the trade on relevant control measures and suggest the importers to use the refrigeration facilities at all three cargo terminals when needed.

The spokesman said that safeguarding food safety is the primary concern of the Government. As such, relevant documents and packaging labels for each consignment is required to be examined by CFS staff members according to established procedures. The duration of clearance process for each consignment depends on multiple factors, such as clarity and completeness of the related documents or information, the number of consignments, and whether many consignments arrive at the same time, leading to long queues, among others.

Cases requiring longer clearance time may be due to the need to provide supplementary information or clarification regarding discrepancies between the actual content of the consignment and corresponding documents. Furthermore, for individual consignments that contain a large number of different types and origins of food products, the inspection will be longer, resulting in longer clearance time. The spokesman reminds the trade that clarity, completeness and accuracy of information provided can help to shorten the inspection time.

On the other hand, the Airport Authority provides refrigeration facilities at all three cargo terminals for importers to store food when needed. The CFS will issue advisory letters to the trade to remind them that the refrigeration facilities can be used to store food while waiting for

inspection.

In order to enhance communication, the CFS will again hold online briefing for the trade on September 20 to explain in details the points to note during clearance and assistance that CFS staff can provide.