

Pesticide residue exceeds legal limit in white string beans sample

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (November 21) announced that a white string beans sample was found to contain pesticide residue at a level exceeding the legal limit. The CFS is following up on the case.

A CFS spokesman said, "The CFS collected the white string beans sample from an online shop for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that the sample contained carbofuran at a level of 0.87 parts per million (ppm), exceeding the legal maximum residue limit (MRL) of 0.1 ppm.

"Based on the level of pesticide residue detected in the sample, acute adverse health impacts on high consumers cannot be ruled out. Symptoms include vomiting, nausea, abdominal cramps, sweating, diarrhoea, blurred vision, breathing difficulties and elevated blood pressure," he added.

Generally speaking, to reduce pesticide residues in vegetables, members of the public can rinse vegetables thoroughly under clean running water, and scrub produce with hard surfaces with a clean brush to remove dirt and substances including pesticides and contaminants from the surface and the crevices, when appropriate.

Any person who imports, manufactures or sells any food not in compliance with the requirements of the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (Cap 132CM) concerning pesticide residues commits an offence and is liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for six months upon conviction.

Since the regulation came into effect on August 1, 2014, the CFS has taken over 162,300 samples at import, wholesale and retail levels for testing for pesticide residues. Together with the unsatisfactory sample announced today, a total of 239 food samples (including 231 vegetable and fruit samples) have been detected as having excessive pesticide residues. The overall unsatisfactory rate is less than 0.2 per cent.

The spokesman added that excessive pesticide residues in food may arise from the trade not observing Good Agricultural Practice, e.g. using excessive pesticides and/or not allowing sufficient time for pesticides to decompose before harvesting. The MRLs of pesticide residues in food set in the Regulation are not safety indicators. They are the maximum concentrations of pesticide residues to be permitted in a food commodity under Good Agricultural Practice when applying pesticides. In this connection, consumption of food with pesticide residues higher than the MRLs will not necessarily lead to any adverse health effects.

The CFS will follow up on the unsatisfactory result, including tracing the source of the food in question and taking samples for testing.

Investigation is ongoing.