

Prepackaged date sample detected with sulphur dioxide exceeding legal limit and in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (September 22) announced that a sample of prepackaged dates was detected with sulphur dioxide, a preservative, at a level exceeding the legal limit, and the name of the additive was also not declared on the food label. Members of the public should not consume the affected batch of the product. The trade should also stop using or selling the affected batch of the product immediately if they possess it.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: (Not available in English)

Brand: (Not available in English)

Net weight: 16 taels

Best-before date: October 20, 2024

Distributor: (Not available in English)

"The CFS collected the above-mentioned sample from a retail outlet in Tsim Sha Tsui for testing when following up on a related incident. The test result showed that the sample contained sulphur dioxide at a level of 230 parts per million (ppm), exceeding the legal limit of 100 ppm. The name of the additive was also not declared on the food label," a spokesman for the CFS said.

"The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularities and instructed them to stop sale and remove from shelves the affected batch of the product. The distributor concerned has initiated a recall according to the CFS's instructions. Members of the public may call its hotline at 2742 9811 during office hours for enquiries about the recall," the spokesman added.

Sulphur dioxide is a preservative which can be used in a variety of foods including dried vegetables, dried fruits, pickled vegetables and salted fish products. Sulphur dioxide is water soluble, and 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 after consumption.

The spokesman reminded the food trade that the use of preservatives in food must comply with the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD). Furthermore, the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W) require that for all prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong containing sulphite in a concentration of 10 parts per million or more, the functional

class of the sulphite and its name shall be specified in the list of ingredients. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment upon conviction.

The CFS will alert the trade, continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. An investigation is ongoing.