

Prepackaged dried mushroom and date samples in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (June 28) that a prepackaged dried mushroom sample and a prepackaged date sample were found to contain sulphur dioxide, a preservative which is allowed to be used in food, but its functional class and name were not declared on the product's food label, in breach of the food labelling regulations. Follow-up is in progress.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: (Not available in English)
Place of origin: Japan
Retailer: (Not available in English)
Net weight: 0.5 catty per pack
Best-before date: December 31, 2022

Product name: (Not available in English)
Place of origin: China
Retailer: Premier Food Ltd
Net weight: 450 grams per pack
Best-before date: December 30, 2022

"The CFS collected the above-mentioned samples from two retail outlets for testing respectively under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test results showed that the dried mushroom sample and the date sample contained sulphur dioxide at levels of 31 parts per million (ppm) and 65 ppm, respectively. Although the levels are within the legal limits, the functional class and name of the additive were not declared on the food labels," a CFS spokesman said.

"The CFS has informed the vendors concerned of the irregularities. According to the CFS's instructions, the retailers concerned have initiated a recall on the affected batches of the products. Members of the public may call their hotlines at 3188 3141 (for dried mushroom)/2291 6216 (for date) during office hours for enquiries about the recall of the products concerned. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence," the spokesman added.

Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative 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 prepackaged food shall be legibly marked or labelled with a list of ingredients. The regulations also state that for all prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong containing sulphite in a concentration of 10 ppm 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.