

Tinned lettuce sample in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 5) that a sample of tinned lettuce was found to contain sulphur dioxide, but the functional class and name of such additive were 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: Salted lettuce
Brand: Pigeon brand
Sole agent: Golden Long Food Trading Limited
Place of origin: Thailand
Net weight: 140 grams/5 ounces per tin
Best-before date: July 19, 2022

"The CFS collected the abovementioned sample from a supermarket in Tsing Yi for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that the sample contained sulphur dioxide, however, the functional class and name of such additive were not declared on the food label of the sample," a CFS spokesman said.

"The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity and instructed it to stop sale and remove from shelves the affected batch of the product. The sole agent concerned has initiated a recall according to CFS' instructions. Members of the public may call the sole agent's hotline at 2566 3007 during office hours for enquiries about the recall. The CFS is also tracing the source of the affected product," 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. This preservative is of low toxicity. As it is water soluble, most of it can be removed through washing and cooking. However, susceptible individuals who are allergic to this preservative may experience breathing difficulties, headache 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. Investigation is ongoing.