

Two prepackaged date samples in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 15) that two samples of prepackaged date were found to contain sulphur dioxide, a preservative which is allowed to be used in certain foods, but the functional class and/or name of the additive were not declared on the food labels. Members of the public should not consume the affected products. The trade should also stop using or selling the affected products immediately if they possess them.

Product details are as follows:

Sample (1)

Product name: Chinese Date

Brand: Green dot dot

Place of origin: China

Net weight: 350 grams

Distributor: Organic Gardens International Limited (recall hotline: 3181 4488)

Sample (2)

Product name: (Not available in English)

Brand: (Not available in English)

Place of origin: China

Net weight: 605g

Distributor: (Not available in English) (recall hotline: 2300 1800)

Best-before date: October 31, 2022

"The CFS collected sample (1) from a department store in Hung Hom for testing when following up on an earlier relevant incident, and collected sample (2) from an online shop for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test results showed that both samples contained sulphur dioxide. Although the sulphur dioxide levels were below the maximum permitted level under the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD), the functional class and/or name of the additive were not declared on the food labels of the samples," a CFS spokesman said.

"The CFS has informed the vendors concerned of the irregularities, and instructed them to stop sale and remove from shelves the affected product of sample (1) and the affected batch of the product of sample (2) respectively. The above-mentioned distributors have initiated recalls according to the CFS' instructions. Members of the public may call the respective hotlines above during office hours for enquiries about the recalls. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence," 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, 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.