

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of the 60th Meeting
held at 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, 24 November 2015,
at Room 1801, 18/F, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong.**

Prof Lo Yuk-lam	(Chairman)
Dr Doris AU Wai-ting	Dr Felix CHAN Hon-wai, JP
Mr CHAN Wai-ming, MH, JP	Prof CHIU Siu-wai
Dr CHUNG Shan-shan	Ms Josephine KEA Chi-shun
Mr Stephen LEUNG Kwok-keung	Prof Kenneth LEUNG Mei-yee
Mrs Sandra MAK WONG Siu-chun	Dr Leo POON Lit-man
Mrs Cherry TSE LING Kit-ching, JP	Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)
Miss Vivian LAU Lee-kwan, JP	Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
Dr LEUNG Siu-fai, JP	Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Dr Liza TO May-kei	Principal Medical & Health Officer (Epidemiology Section), Department of Health
Miss Hinny LAM Shuk-yee	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) ³ (Secretary to ACFEH)

Absent with Apologies

Mr Abraham CHAN Yu-ling	Mrs Vivien CHEN CHOU Mei-mei
Mrs Jenny LAM WEN Mei-fong	Mr Simon TAM Hop-sing
Prof WONG Wing-tak	Prof Samuel WONG Yeung-shan

In Attendance

Food and Health Bureau (FHB)

Mr Christopher WONG Kwok-bun, JP	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1
Mr Philip CHAN Kwan-ye, JP	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2
Mr Kenneth CHAN Siu-yum	Principal Assistant Secretary (Food)1
Miss Diane WONG Shuk-han	Principal Assistant Secretary (Food)2
Miss Jenny SEZTO Kar-man	Assistant Secretary (Food)3
Miss Fanny YEUNG Pou-ian	Assistant Secretary (Food)4

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD)

Mr CHIU Yu-chow	Assistant Director (Grade Management and Development)
Dr LEE Siu-yuen, JP	Assistant Director (Food Surveillance & Control)
Mr LI Ka-kei	Assistant Director (Operations)1

Opening Remarks

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of the Minutes of the Last Meeting

2. The minutes were confirmed without amendments.

Agenda Item 2 : Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting

3. The Chairman briefed members on the visit to the Food Safety Laboratory held on 30 September 2015, which 8 members including the Chairman attended. During the visit, members were briefed on the expansion project of the Food Safety Laboratory, and toured around the food safety testing facilities. The Chairman invited members who had attended the visit to share their views.

4. Dr Chung Shan-shan commented that the visit provided detailed explanation on the work of the Food Safety Laboratory, but she would like to explore more on their work of analysis and sample preparation. She considered a centralized Food Safety Laboratory helpful in achieving more effective results. Mr Stephen LEUNG appreciated the visit which was interesting and he agreed that it would be desirable to centralise the different operation of the Food Safety Laboratory under one roof.

Agenda Item 3 : Promotion of Green Burial (Confidential Item) (ACFEH Paper No. 8/2015)

5. The discussions are kept in strict confidence.

Agenda Item 4 : Enhancing the monitoring and surveillance of food trading and imports (ACFEH paper No. 9/2015)

6. Dr LEE Siu-yuen and Mr LI Ka-kei introduced the paper.

7. Dr Chung Shan-shan enquired what measures could be taken by the Government if the importers claimed that the imports were not food. Dr LEE Siu-yuen explained that this would be an illegal act. She added that the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) would conduct random inspection and check the source of the food products, but she acknowledged that it might be difficult for C&ED to take enforcement actions without intelligence. Apart from control at the import level, FEHD also conducted surveillance at retail and wholesale levels by taking samples from the food sold on the market. In the event of any problematic food samples found, FEHD would trace the source of the food products and take enforcement actions as appropriate.

8. Dr Doris AU enquired about the criteria for conducting random sampling and any relevant statistics on the number of samples taken. Dr LEE Siu-yuen replied that about 65 000 samples (including all types of food at wholesale, retail and import levels) were taken under the Food Surveillance Programme each year. The number of samples for each type of food would be determined based on risk assessment. For food with higher risks, more samples would be taken. In Hong Kong, Centre for Food Safety (CFS) took 9 samples for every 1 000 citizens each year, which was among the highest ratio in comparison to other places around the world.

9. Mr CHAN Wai-ming acknowledged that FEHD had been reporting the progress on the work of food safety to Legislative Council every year since 2012. He would like to enquire whether FEHD had sufficient manpower to handle matters including sample taking and testing, inspection, enforcement, etc, and whether there was any plan to increase manpower. He further enquired whether there had been food safety programmes in universities to nurture talents in this field or whether this would be considered.

10. In response, Dr LEE Siu-yuen said that the manpower in CFS had increased in recent years in tandem with the introduction of new legislation. The workload arising from the tightening up of control of online trading would be absorbed by existing manpower, adding that CFS would also step up public education. She observed that there had been more modules focusing on food safety at universities these years. The Chairman supplemented that organisations such as the Hong Kong Food Council and the International Food

Safety Association had been cooperating with local institutions such as the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Vocational Training Council to provide training related to food safety.

11. Prof Kenneth LEUNG enquired whether there was an increasing trend in food poisoning cases in connection with online trading. Dr LEE Siu-yuen responded that CFS had tested over 1 000 food samples sourced from online traders and the testing results were all satisfactory. Referring to the food incident in 2015 involving the consumption of sandwiches made by a Taiwanese company, she pointed out that the main crux of the matter was not solely related to online trading but also the mishandling of the food during transport and by the end-consumers. Prof LEUNG further enquired whether there had been any mechanism in place to provide benchmark for the Food Surveillance Programme to let the public know the relative standard of local food safety comparing to other places. Dr LEE replied that the number of food poisoning cases and number of samples taken and tested to be unsatisfactory had been diminishing in recent years. Dr Liza TO supplemented that when Department of Health received reports of suspected food poisoning cases, they would investigate and would also ascertain if it was a single incident or there were linked cases. Generally speaking, food poisoning cases due to online purchase were rare in recent years.

12. Mr Stephen LEUNG enquired how monitoring could be carried out if the online traders were outside Hong Kong and if the food was delivered to the end-consumers directly. Mr LI Ka-kei responded that under existing legislation, food traders were required to register with FEHD and secure business registration certificates and the law did not differentiate food operators with and without physical shops. FEHD regularly monitored food trading at online shops and conducted decoy operation to assist in investigation and enforcement. He said that it would be difficult for FEHD to take investigation or enforcement actions if the business was not accompanied by business registration certificate and the online shop was registered overseas.

13. Miss Vivian LAU supplemented that the increasing trend of cross-border online shopping made the monitoring and enforcement work more challenging. She added that the Government would consider requiring licensed food traders to disclose information such as the licence number and the registered address on their online promotional materials, such that consumers could check the food traders' licence status against the database provided at FEHD's website, and be better placed to shop smart and protect themselves. [Post-meeting note: FEHD has prepared a new set of permits for the regulation of online sale of

restricted foods to safeguard food safety. Permits for selling restricted foods online were open for application starting from 22 February 2016.]

14. The Chairman commented that online shopping had become a trend and suggested that Hong Kong could draw reference from the experience of the Mainland which was quite advanced in this regard.

15. Dr Leo POON enquired about the proportion among the 1 000 food samples taken for testing that were regarded as high-risk food. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen responded that CFS did not have breakdowns as to the number of samples that were from high-risk food. Mr LI Ka-kei supplemented that according to the monitoring by FEHD, there were some 1 000 internet sites involved in food sale, of which some 200 were not licensed with FEHD. Miss Vivian LAU remarked that the sale of food per se did not necessarily require a licence from FEHD, but only restricted food such as sashimi and oysters etc would require licensing.

16. Prof Kenneth LEUNG commented that some people might not know how to apply for a licence if they wanted to sell restricted food, and more publicity on this would be helpful.

17. Mrs Cherry TSE acknowledged that we should step up publicity and public education to better respond to the growing trend of internet trading and to remind the trade and members of the public of the relevant legal requirements. A registration system should be maintained to safeguard the interest of consumers, allowing traceability of the source of the food products in question, with enforcement actions serving as a deterrent to malpractices.

18. Mr LI Ka-kei added that FEHD would step up consumer education on purchasing food online, especially for high-risk food; and also publicity effort targeted at the trade to keep them abreast of the relevant regulatory requirements. In this regard, FEHD had already planned to launch a new API targeted at consumers in December 2015 and another one targeting at the trade in early 2016.

Agenda Item 5: Any other business

19. Mrs Cherry TSE proposed and the Chairman and Members agreed that we arrange visits for ACFEH Members to green burial services such as observing the scattering cremains at sea and Gardens of Remembrance. The Secretariat would follow up and inform Members of the detailed arrangements in due course.

20. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m. The Secretariat would inform members of the date of the next meeting in due course.

Secretariat

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

March 2016