

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

**Summary of Food Safety Measures in response to the Japan Fukushima
Nuclear Incident**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the food safety measures in response to the Japan Fukushima nuclear incident, including food surveillance work carried out by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) and the issuance of an order under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) to prohibit the import and supply of certain food products from five prefectures in Japan.

Background

2. Owing to the massive earthquake and the subsequent tsunami which happened in Japan on 11 March 2011, the Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima prefecture was damaged, leading to release of radioactive substances in the environment. Tests by the Japan authorities have demonstrated that the release of radioactive substances has contaminated certain foods in a number of prefectures at levels hazardous to human health.

Food Surveillance

3. Fresh produce e.g. milk, vegetables, fruits, etc. are more prone to radiation contamination immediately after nuclear incident. Therefore CFS has, since 12 March, stepped up surveillance and has tested the radiation level of fresh food imported from Japan, including vegetables, fruits and milk. Other foodstuffs such as meat, aquatic products and milk powder are also monitored. CFS currently adopts the standards laid down by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) in the Guideline Levels for Radionuclides in Foods Contaminated following a Nuclear or Radiological Emergency (Guideline Levels) in testing the radiation levels of food. Relevant radionuclides include iodine-131 (level: 100 bq/kg), caesium-134 and caesium-137 (level: 1,000 bq/kg), etc, which are most closely associated with health risks.

4. Currently, for every food consignment from Japan, screening is conducted by hand-held survey meter for surface contamination and samples

will be taken from every consignment of fresh produce (such as vegetables, fruits, milk, meat, etc.) and milk powder for examination by using Contamination Monitoring System (CMS). As regards other food items, samples would also be taken for examination by using CMS. Food consignment that fails hand-held survey meter and CMS screening will be held and sample will be sent to Government Laboratory for further quantitative analysis.

5. As at 4 April 2011 noon, a total of 1 036 samples have been tested. All have satisfactory result except the three samples mentioned in paragraph 6 below.

Order Made under section 78B of Cap. 132

6. By 23 March 2011, tests by the Japan authorities had demonstrated that the release of radioactive substances has contaminated certain foods in the prefectures in the vicinity of the nuclear power plant, including Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma. Radiation levels hazardous to human health were found in foods including various vegetables and milk.

7. On 23 March 2011, three samples of vegetables imported into Hong Kong on 23 March 2011 from Chiba prefecture were detected to contain iodine-131 with a level exceeding the standards laid down in the Guideline Levels, including a white radish sample at 260 Bq/kg, a turnip sample at 800 Bq/kg and a spinach sample at 1 000 Bq/kg. Although consumption of the food would not pose immediate health risks, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) decided to make an order under section 78B of Cap.132 (the Order) to safeguard food safety and public health.

8. Section 78B(1) of Cap. 132 provides that the Authority (i.e. DFEH) may make an order to, among others, prohibit the import and the supply of any food for the period specified in the order. Section 78B(2) stipulates that the Authority may only make a section 78B order if the Authority has reasonable grounds at the time of making the order to believe that the making of the order is necessary to prevent or reduce a possibility of danger to public health or to mitigate any adverse consequence of a danger to public health.

9. Consumption of food contaminated with radioactive substances will increase the amount of radioactivity a person is exposed to and could increase the health risks, including cancers, associated with the exposure. DFEH therefore decided it was necessary to make the Order to prevent or reduce a possibility of danger to public health brought about by the import of the radiation-contaminated food.

10. The Order was published in the gazette on 24 March 2011 and a copy of

it is at **Annex**. The Order prohibits the import and supply of the following food products which are/were harvested, manufactured, processed or packed on or after 11 March 2011 from the five affected prefectures in Japan, namely Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma –

- All fruits and vegetables;
- All milk, milk beverages, dried milk; and
- All chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, all poultry eggs and all live, chilled or frozen aquatic products, unless accompanied by a certificate issued by the competent authority of Japan certifying that the radiation levels do not exceed the standards laid down by the Guideline Levels.

11. The Order is directed to all persons and has taken effect at 12:00 noon on 24 March 2011. Any person who contravenes a term of the Order commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine at level 6 (\$100,000) and to imprisonment for 12 months.

12. As for other processed food imported from Japan, for example, biscuits, candies, cakes, and frozen confections, the CFS will continue surveillance at the import level by conducting tests for radiation level. As part of CFS' food surveillance programme, samples will be taken at wholesale and retail level for radiation testing. In response to the public concern over radiation contamination, CFS has also increased the number of samples of Japanese food taken for radiation testing. The results so far are all satisfactory.

Liaison with the Japanese Government and Stakeholders

13. CFS has been monitoring the situation in Japan closely and developments in the relevant areas through close liaison with the Consulate-General of Japan in order to obtain more information. CFS met with the importers and distributors supplying Japanese food on 14 March and briefed the trade again on the section 78B order issued by DFEH on 23 March 2011. CFS will continue to closely monitor the situation and make reference to the recommendations of the International Atomic Energy Agency which announced that a High Level Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety will be held in June 2011. Announcements of any new development or measures will be made in a timely manner.

**Food and Health Bureau
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