CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 5211)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

(a) Please advise the number of food container tests conducted by the Department and the number of containers which failed the tests over the past 5 years; and

(b) What mechanism is in place for testing and monitoring plasticisers in food containers?

Asked by: Hon TAM Man-ho, Jeremy (Member Question No. (LegCo use): 605)

Reply:

The safety of food containers is regulated under the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (Cap. 456) (CGSO), which the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) is the enforcement agency. It is an offence under CGSO for any person to import, manufacture or supply consumer goods unless they comply with the general safety requirement. Over the past 5 years, C&ED conducted testing, including the specific migration limits of related plasticisers, on 31 models of food container. All samples passed the tests.

As far as food safety is concerned, the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) stipulates that all food for sale in Hong Kong must be fit for human consumption. The food surveillance programme of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department covers different types of testing of food samples. Over the past 5 years, CFS collected more than 1 650 food samples for testing of phthalates as an indication of possible migration of these substances from food contact materials to food, if any. 1 sample was found in 2016 to contain a plasticiser at a level above the action level adopted by CFS. All test results of other samples were satisfactory.

In 2017, CFS completed a risk assessment study on phthalate plasticisers in food, in which more than 300 samples of various food items were taken from the local market for testing of plasticisers. The study results revealed that the dietary exposure of the local population to phthalate plasticisers was well within the corresponding "health-based guidance values" established by international authorities, suggesting that adverse health effects were unlikely.

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