

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 0109)

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 (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

Japan plans to implement a decades-long discharge plan of Fukushima's treated nuclear water this year. Please advise this Committee of the following:

1. Has the Government conducted any assessment on the extent of impact of the discharge of wastewater into the sea by the Fukushima nuclear power station on various industries of Hong Kong (such as the fisheries and catering industries) so as to formulate specific action plans and mitigation measures? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?
2. Will new equipment and instruments be procured and new technologies be employed (such as studying the feasibility of using multi-purpose archway detector with a belt conveyor system) for surveillance of radiation levels of Japanese food to increase the speed, quantities and effectiveness of the testing work? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?
3. Will the nuclear radiation testing standards be raised to safeguard public health? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?
4. Will the Government impose an import ban on agricultural and fisheries products from all areas of Japan if Japan is to launch the aforesaid plan? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?

Asked by: Hon YANG Wing-kit (LegCo internal reference no.: 28)

Reply:

1. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has repeatedly expressed its grave concern about the impact of Japan's wastewater discharge plan on food safety, and made clear that the Japanese authorities should not discharge the nuclear wastewater unilaterally without the consensus of the international community, so as to avoid bringing about irreversible impacts on the environment.

The investigation report of the task force of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has yet to be published. The Environment and Ecology Bureau has set up an interdepartmental taskforce with the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the relevant government departments including the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Hong Kong Observatory, the Department of Health and the Government Laboratory (GL) to evaluate the impact of the discharge plan on food safety and draw up response measures. The details of the specific measures will be determined, having regard to all pertinent factors, including the conclusion of the final report of the IAEA as well as other relevant information and assessment results. We will coordinate the work of the relevant departments, including stepping up testing and releasing testing results to the public and the trade in a timely manner, in order to dispel public concerns and misunderstandings.

The Government will keep in touch with the local trades concerned, including importers of Japanese food products and catering operators, to enable them to have a better grasp of the latest position of the discharge plan and the possible import control measures which the Government may implement to safeguard food safety.

2. From March 2011 to January 2023, CFS tested more than 770 000 samples of imported Japanese food products, all with radiation levels not exceeding the guideline levels of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). CFS has released the results of the radiological tests on its website and in the monthly food safety report. In response to Japan's discharge plan, CFS has planned to increase the tests on imported Japanese food products, particularly those on aquatic products and targeted testing of specific radioactive substances. GL has procured the equipment required for the work.
3. Regarding the nuclear radiation testing standards, CFS will continue to adopt the standards laid down by the CAC in the Guideline Levels for Radionuclides in Food following Accidental Nuclear Contamination in testing the radiation levels of food to safeguard public health. The CAC was established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization to develop food safety standards for protecting consumers' health.
4. According to existing information, aquatic products from Fukushima and the nearby prefectures are at a higher risk to be affected by the discharge plan. To ensure food safety and public confidence, we expect that import control on aquatic products from the related prefectures may have to be tightened for a period of time after the commencement of the discharge. Such control measures include suspending the import of aquatic products from some prefectures shipped after commencement of the discharge or requiring such aquatic products to be accompanied by radiation certificates certifying that their radiation levels do not exceed the guideline levels of the CAC; otherwise, such food products cannot be imported into Hong Kong.

Currently, the IAEA's review on the safety of the wastewater discharge plan is still in progress. The details of the control measures, including the prefectures to be covered, will depend on the conclusion of the final report of the IAEA, the relevant information provided by the Japanese authorities and the risk assessment results, etc.

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