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POLICY

Voluntary - Public

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Hong Kong

Post: Hong Kong

Original Health Certificate Mandatory for Shipment Release

Report Categories:

FAIRS Subject Report

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

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Report Highlights:

Exporters are reminded to send original health certificates to Hong Kong importers in a timely manner so that Hong Kong importers can collect shipments upon arrival in Hong Kong. The prompt delivery of original health certificates is particularly important for air shipments. The Hong Kong Center for Food Safety (CFS) no longer allows flexibility to issue a Release Letter for shipment collection when importers can only show a photocopy of the health certificate while agreeing to submit the original copy at a later stage. This measure is being strictly enforced after the government audit department criticized CFS in a recent public report.

Hong Kong requires meat and poultry product importers to apply for an import license prior to importation. The import license is required for each shipment and is valid for six weeks. In addition, high-risk products including milk, frozen confections, game meats, egg, chilled and ground meats, and meat and poultry products that have been transshipped through a third-market before arriving in Hong Kong are required to have an import permit, which is valid for six months.

Health certificates are required to issue the license for meat and poultry products Release Letters for the above-mentioned high risk products. This requirement has been in place for years. The recent change is the removal of the flexibility of allowing for submission of original health certificates after the issuance of Release Letters. Photocopies are still acceptable for the import license application.

In the past, when importers failed to provide the original, but were able to show a photocopy of the health certificate, the CFS very often would allow some flexibility in issuing a Release Letter for shipments, provided that importers agreed to show the required original certificates at a later stage. This was interpreted as a trade facilitation measure. Such unofficial flexibility had turned into a de facto practice, particularly for air shipments given their short window for shipment arrival, until it was recently reprimanded by the government audit department in a public report accusing the CFS of not enforcing import regulations effectively.

The CFS has subsequently rectified the situation. CFS officials told importers at a trade forum that they have to submit the original copy of the health certificate for obtaining a Release Letter for shipments that require mandatory certification. No exception will be provided.

This requirement of showing an original copy of health certificates applies to all products, by air and sea, which require mandatory certification. U.S. exporters, therefore, are reminded to send the original copy of health certificates to Hong Kong importers in a timely manner in order to allow them to collect shipments upon arrival in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Center for Food Safety made it clear that no flexibility will be given for the submission of original health certificates after shipment release.