

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT
POLICY

Voluntary Public

Date: 6/3/2011

GAIN Report Number: HK1123

Hong Kong

Post: Hong Kong

Hong Kong to Monitor DEHP Levels in Food Imports

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

Food Processing Ingredients Sector

Food Security

Policy and Program Announcements

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Approved By:

Erich Kuss

Prepared By:

Caroline Yuen

Report Highlights:

In the wake of a recent incident in Taiwan in which a clouding agent used in drinks has been adulterated with DEHP, a potentially cancer-causing additive used in plastics, the Hong Kong government (HKG) promptly set a maximum of concentration limit of the substance in food and medication.

Summary

On June 3, 2011, the Secretary for Food and Health Bureau announced that Hong Kong will set a maximum threshold of 1.5 mg/kg for di(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate (DEHP) in food or medication. Also, Hong Kong will include DEHP in Hong Kong's routine surveillance for prepackaged food that may be produced with the usage of clouding agents.

In the wake of a recent incident in Taiwan in which a clouding agent used in drinks had been adulterated with DEHP, a potentially cancer-causing additive used in plastics, the Hong Kong government (HKG) promptly set the maximum of concentration limit of the substance in food and medication. The Chairman of the Expert Committee, which advises the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (FEHD) on food safety strategies and measures to safeguard the public health, explained that the decision is based on two considerations. First, DEHP is not a food additive and the addition of DEHP into food is not approved by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations/World Health Organization (WHO) Codex Alimentarius Commission or by any national authorities. Secondly, DEHP may be present in food due to migration from food contact materials such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC) packaging materials and tubes, or from environmental contaminations. Therefore, they will not adopt a zero-tolerance approach saying that it is impractical given a lot of plastic food containers may contain DEHP and there are other environmental contaminates.

The HKG stressed that the proposed level is considered adequate to protect public health and useful to distinguish the presence of DEHP in food from environmental contamination or migration via food contact materials from adulteration. In Hong Kong, the average food consumption, including liquid and water, of the population is about 3 kg/person/day. Even in the unlikely event that one third of the food consumed by a person is contaminated, if a maximum limit of 1.5 mg/kg for DEHP in food is set, the exposure to DEHP of a 60-kg adult is still within the WHO's Tolerable Daily Intake.

Before the adulteration of DEHP in food was reported in Taiwan, DEHP was not included in Hong Kong's routine surveillance. However, Hong Kong's routine surveillance for prepackaged food in the future will include screening for this chemical to safeguard human health.

To date, Hong Kong has banned 1 kind of fruit jelly and 2 kinds of sports drinks from Taiwan effective June 2 and May 31 respectively due to concerns over DEHP contamination.