

Relief fund for farmers affected by Tropical Cyclone Wipha

Local farmers who suffered serious losses caused by the Tropical Cyclone Wipha can register with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) from tomorrow (August 2) to August 12 for assistance from an emergency relief fund.

An AFCD spokesman said today (August 1) that an appropriate amount of the relief fund would be released to affected farming households according to established criteria.

The department's preliminary investigation has revealed that about 300 hectares of farmland in the New Territories were affected by the typhoon.

"After each typhoon or natural disaster, our staff will inspect farmland areas in the New Territories to assess the resultant damage," the spokesman said.

"Depending on the gravity of the damage, we may launch an operation to provide some relief to affected farmers."

Applicants for the fund should register at the office of the Department's Agricultural Extension Section at 5/F, Yuen Long Government Offices, 2 Kiu Lok Square, Yuen Long, or call 2476 2424 for enquiries.

CFS finds traces of malachite green in grass carp sample

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (August 1) announced that a trace amount of malachite green was found in a grass carp sample. A follow-up is in progress.

A CFS spokesman said, "The CFS collected the abovementioned grass carp sample from a stall in Kowloon City Market for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that the sample contained a trace amount of malachite green at a level of 1.7 parts per billion."

The spokesman said the CFS had informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity and instructed the vendor to stop the sale of the affected product. Should there be sufficient evidence, prosecution will be initiated. The CFS is also tracing the source of the product concerned.

Malachite green is a type of industrial dye and has been used for treating infections in fish. Malachite green is possibly both genotoxic and carcinogenic. According to the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives, there is no safe level of residues of malachite green or its metabolites in food that represents an acceptable risk to consumers. Currently, malachite green has been prohibited for use in food-producing animals in many countries. According to the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap 132AF), no food sold in Hong Kong is allowed to contain malachite green. Offenders will be prosecuted and will be liable to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for six months upon conviction.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. An investigation is ongoing.

Contractor of construction site in Tseung Kwan O convicted of contravening Noise Control Ordinance

Aggressive Construction Company Limited, the contractor of a construction site at Lohas Park in Tseung Kwan O, was convicted and fined \$25,000 at Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts today (August 1) for contravening the Noise Control Ordinance (NCO) as a result of illegally carrying out works on a holiday that were not allowed in accordance with a construction noise permit (CNP).

In December last year, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) received a complaint from a member of the public that works were carried out at a construction site at Lohas Park in Tseung Kwan O on a holiday, making noise and causing a nuisance to nearby residents. During a blitz operation conducted by the EPD, officers discovered that the demolition of formwork and other relevant works were carried out at the construction site on a Sunday, generating noise from hammering and causing a nuisance to nearby residents. The above-mentioned noisy works were not allowed by the CNP for the construction site. The EPD revoked the permit for the construction site immediately and prosecuted the contractor of the construction site under the NCO.

The NCO aims to protect the public from disturbance of rest. The EPD spokesman stressed that building contractors should arrange for construction works to be carried out during daytime and non-general holidays as far as possible to minimise disturbance to nearby residents. If building contractors have to carry out prescribed construction works (such as erection or dismantling of formwork or scaffolding; construction works involving loading,

unloading or handling of building materials, such as rubble, wooden boards, steel bars, wood or scaffolding; or hammering) or use powered mechanical equipment during restricted hours (between 7pm and 7am on the following day, or at any time on a general holiday), they must obtain a permit from the EPD in advance. When carrying out works, building contractors should only carry out approved works or use specified powered mechanical equipment with noise mitigation measures in place within the periods specified in a CNP. Otherwise it constitutes an offence. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$100,000 on first conviction. A maximum fine of \$200,000 may be imposed on a second or subsequent conviction.

Provisional statistics of retail sales for June 2019

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (August 1).

The value of total retail sales in June 2019, provisionally estimated at \$35.2 billion, decreased by 6.7% compared with the same month in 2018. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in May 2019 decreased by 1.4% compared with a year earlier. For the first half of 2019, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales decreased by 2.6% compared with the same period in 2018.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in June 2019 decreased by 7.6% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in May 2019 decreased by 1.8% compared with a year earlier. For the first half of 2019, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales decreased by 3.1% in volume compared with the same period in 2018.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing June 2019 with June 2018, the value of sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts decreased by 17.1%. This was followed by sales of medicines and cosmetics (-4.1% in value); wearing apparel (-8.2%); commodities in department stores (-6.0%); food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (-1.3%); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods, not elsewhere classified (-16.1%); motor vehicles and parts (-9.1%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-1.4%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (-4.5%); Chinese drugs and herbs (-0.1%); and optical shops (-11.9%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets increased by 1.6% in June 2019 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of other consumer goods, not elsewhere classified (+0.3% in value);

fuels (+1.9%); and furniture and fixtures (+1.1%).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales decreased by 2.7% in the second quarter of 2019 compared with the preceding quarter, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 2.8%.

These retail sales statistics measure the sales receipts in respect of goods sold by local retail establishments and are primarily intended for gauging the short-term business performance of the local retail sector. Data on retail sales are collected from local retail establishments through the Monthly Survey of Retail Sales (MRS). Local retail establishments with and without physical shops are covered in MRS and their sales, both through conventional shops and online channels, are included in the retail sales statistics.

The retail sales statistics cover consumer spending on goods but not on services (such as those on housing, catering, medical care and health services, transport and communication, financial services, education and entertainment) which account for over 50% of the overall consumer spending. Moreover, they include spending on goods in Hong Kong by visitors but exclude spending outside Hong Kong by Hong Kong residents. Hence they should not be regarded as indicators for measuring overall consumer spending.

Users interested in the trend of overall consumer spending should refer to the data series of private consumption expenditure (PCE), which is a major component of the Gross Domestic Product published at quarterly intervals. Compiled from a wide range of data sources, PCE covers consumer spending on both goods (including goods purchased from all channels) and services by Hong Kong residents whether locally or abroad. Please refer to the C&SD publication "Gross Domestic Product (Quarterly)" for more details.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that retail sales registered an enlarged decline in June, as local consumer sentiment turned more cautious and growth in visitor arrivals moderated.

The spokesman pointed out further that the near-term performance of retail sales will likely remain subdued, as the weakened global and local economic outlook and other headwinds continue to weigh on consumption sentiment. The recent mass demonstrations, if continued, would also dent the retail business further. The Government will continue to monitor the situation.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures on value index and value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for May 2019 as well as the provisional figures for June 2019. The provisional figures on the value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet as well as the corresponding year-on-year changes for the first half

of 2019 are also shown.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for May 2019 as well as the provisional figures for June 2019. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first half of 2019 are also shown.

Table 3 shows the movements of the value and volume of total retail sales in terms of the year-on-year rate of change for a month compared with the same month in the preceding year based on the original series, and in terms of the rate of change for a three-month period compared with the preceding three-month period based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The classification of retail establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales". Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=B1080003).

Alternatively, the historical series of retail sales statistics can be downloaded in the form of a statistical table at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=D5600089).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7400; email: mrs@censtatd.gov.hk).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Thursday, August 1, 2019 is 105.6 (up 0.4 against yesterday's index).