

Prepackaged lobster meat with crab paste sample in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (June 16) that a sample of prepackaged lobster meat with crab paste was found to contain sulphur dioxide, a preservative which is allowed to be used in food, but the functional class and name of the additive were not declared on the food label. Members of the public should not consume the affected batch of the product. The trade should also stop using or selling the affected batch of the product immediately if they possess it.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: Lobster Meat with Crab Paste

Country of origin: Korea

Manufacturer: YD Korea

Hong Kong and Macao sole agent (distributor): Kiu Victory Int'l Trading Limited

Net weight: 90 grams per can

Best-before date: October 25, 2021

"The CFS collected the above-mentioned sample from a supermarket in Quarry Bay for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that the sample contained sulphur dioxide. Although the sulphur dioxide level is below the maximum permitted level under the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap 132BD), the functional class and name of the additive were not declared on the food label of the sample," a CFS spokesman said.

"The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity and instructed it to stop sale and remove from shelves the affected batch of the product. The distributor concerned has initiated a recall according to the CFS' instructions. Members of the public may call the distributor's hotline at 2656 1298 during office hours for enquiries about the recall. The CFS is also tracing the source of the affected product," the spokesman added.

Sulphur dioxide is a preservative of low toxicity used in a variety of foods including dried vegetables, dried fruits, pickled vegetables and salted fish products. However, susceptible individuals who are allergic to this preservative may experience breathing difficulties, headaches and nausea after consumption.

The spokesman reminded the food trade that the use of preservatives in food must comply with the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap 132BD). Furthermore, the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap 132W) require that for all prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong containing

sulphite in a concentration of 10 parts per million or more, the functional class of the sulphite and its name shall be specified in the list of ingredients. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment upon conviction.

The CFS will alert the trade, continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. Investigation is ongoing.

Managers of unlicensed guesthouses fined

Two women were each fined \$4,000 at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts today (June 16) for contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance.

The courts heard that in September and November last year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), the Home Affairs Department, inspected two suspected unlicensed guesthouses at Yung Shue Ha on Lamma Island and on King's Road in North Point. During the inspections, the OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented rooms in these guesthouses on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's records, these guesthouses did not possess licences under the Ordinance on the days of inspection. The women responsible for managing the premises were charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and can lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaenq@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website (www.hadla.gov.hk), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".

Managers and operators fined for illegal club operation

Two men, a woman and a company were fined \$4,000 to \$4,500 at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts today (June 16) for contravening the Clubs (Safety of Premises) Ordinance.

The courts heard that in August and September last year, officers from the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department conducted inspections at two clubs on Yee Wo Street in Causeway Bay and a club on Jardine's Bazaar in Causeway Bay, which had been operating with certificates of compliance (CoCs).

During the investigation in one of the clubs on Yee Wo Street, the OLA officers posed as customers and patronised the club for food and drinks without being asked to show their membership status or being invited to join the club as members. Also, the club's staff failed to show the registered drawing and a copy of the certificate of fire service installation and equipment upon the OLA officers' request. Conditions 10, 12 and 14 of the CoC were breached. The man, being the CoC holder of the club, was charged with contravening section 21(2) of the Ordinance.

The club staff of another club on Yee Wo Street failed to show the registered drawing upon the OLA officers' request. Moreover, the OLA officers found that the club had a layout that deviated from the registered drawing and the number of people at the club exceeded the maximum allowable capacity as stipulated in the CoC. Conditions 3, 6 and 10 of the CoC were breached. The woman, being the manager of the club, was charged with contravening section 21(1)(a) of the Ordinance.

During the investigation in the club on Jardine's Bazaar, the OLA officers posed as customers and patronised the club for food and drinks without being asked to show their membership status or being invited to join the club as members. Also, the club's staff failed to show the registered drawing and a copy of the certificate of fire service installation and equipment upon the OLA officers' request. Conditions 10, 12 and 14 of the CoC were breached. The man, being the manager of the club, and the company, being the CoC holder of the club, were charged with contravening section 21(1)(a) and section 21(2) of the Ordinance respectively.

A spokesman for the department reminded all CoC holders to comply with the conditions as stipulated therein. Enforcement actions will continue to be taken against illegal club operations.

Second-term Human Resources Planning Commission convenes first meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the first meeting of the second-term Human Resources Planning Commission this afternoon (June 16).

At the meeting, members took note of Hong Kong's latest economic performance and labour market situation. Since the beginning of this year, the pandemic has continued to affect a wide range of economic activities and dampened economic sentiment. As a result, the economic recession deepened in Hong Kong in the first quarter and the labour market also deteriorated sharply. While the local epidemic situation has abated recently, it will take time for local economic activities to return to normal. Meanwhile, the external environment remains difficult as the pandemic continues to weigh on the global economy. Hong Kong's near-term economic outlook is still highly challenging.

Members also noted that the Government had rolled out relief measures at an unprecedented scale, including the two rounds of measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund and the one-off measures in the 2020-21 Budget, totalling \$287.5 billion, in order to provide relief to businesses and members of the public hard hit by the pandemic.

Moreover, members were briefed on the "Job Creation" initiative under the Fund. To ease the worsening unemployment situation arising from the pandemic, the Government has set aside \$6 billion under the Fund with a view to creating around 30 000 time-limited jobs in both the public and private sectors in the coming two years for people of different skill sets and academic qualifications, including positions for fresh graduates. Relevant government bureaux and departments are actively carrying out the preparatory and recruitment work related to the scheme.

Besides time-limited positions, the Government will recruit over 10 000 civil servants in the 2020-21 fiscal year to replace retirees and fill new posts to be created in the Estimates. On the other hand, to allow more young people to understand the operation of the Government and gain working experience, the Government will hire about 5 000 short-term youth interns, which includes inviting public organisations to provide placements, in order to increase the diversity of the internship programmes and students' choices.

Members generally welcomed the Government's "Job Creation" initiative. Considering that fresh graduates may experience relatively more difficulties in job hunting in view of the current economic situation, members also discussed how to better help young people secure a job.

Public housing tenant and applicants convicted by courts for making false statements

A spokesman for the Housing Department (HD) today (June 16) reminded all tenants of public rental housing (PRH) estates and PRH applicants to truthfully declare their income and assets, as well as their genuine marital status. Parties concerned in three recent cases were ordered by the courts to serve suspended sentences.

In the first case, a PRH tenant did not declare his ownership of an urban taxi licence on a 2019 Income and Asset Declaration Form. Subsequent investigation revealed that the average market premium of an urban taxi licence was \$5,590,000 in April 2019, which was beyond the prevailing asset limit for three-person family of \$2,310,000, i.e. 100 times of the income limit. The tenant was prosecuted by the HD for neglecting to furnish information specified in the Income and Asset Declaration Form, contrary to Section 27(a) of the Housing Ordinance. The defendant was previously convicted by the presiding magistrate at Shatin Magistrates' Courts, who considered that a fine as punishment would not reflect the gravity of the offence. After considering the report of the probation officer by the Court, the defendant was sentenced of 14 days' imprisonment (suspended for 12 months) yesterday (June 15).

In the second case, a PRH applicant declared on a declaration form during a vetting interview in 2019 that his net asset value of deposits was \$8,084.99. Subsequent investigation, however, revealed that he actually had a net asset value of deposits of \$572,827.34, which exceeded the PRH total net asset limit of \$454,000 for a three-person family in 2019-20, so the family was not eligible to apply for PRH. Eventually, the applicant was prosecuted for making a false statement knowingly, contrary to Section 26(1)(c) of the Housing Ordinance. The defendant was convicted and sentenced of one month's imprisonment (suspended for 12 months) by the presiding magistrate at Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts yesterday as he considered that a fine as punishment would not reflect the gravity of the offence.

In the third case, a PRH applicant and his ex-wife declared their marital status as married during a vetting interview in 2018 and an intake interview in 2019. A PRH flat at So Uk Estate was allocated to them. Subsequent investigation indicated that they were divorced in 2017 and would not be eligible for being offered the PRH flat. Both defendants were prosecuted under Section 26(1)(c) of the Housing Ordinance. They were convicted by the presiding magistrate at Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts yesterday. Considering that a fine as punishment would not reflect the gravity of the offence, both defendants were sentenced to one month's

imprisonment (suspended for 12 months).

The spokesman said that households living in PRH should complete their income and asset declaration forms accurately, as doing so provides the foundation for the assessment of rent and their eligibility for continuing residence. Before making the declarations, households should read the content and completion guidelines of the income and asset declaration form carefully and compute their income and assets in accordance with the methods specified. Otherwise, they may be prosecuted for making a false statement knowingly, contrary to Section 26(1)(a) of the Housing Ordinance (if convicted, the maximum penalty is a \$50,000 fine and imprisonment for six months), or be prosecuted for neglecting to furnish information as specified in a declaration form, contrary to Section 27(a) of the Housing Ordinance (if convicted, the maximum penalty is a \$25,000 fine and imprisonment for three months). Notwithstanding the above, the HD will take action to recover the undercharged rent incurred due to the inaccurate information or even recover their PRH units.

In addition, the spokesman reminded all PRH applicants that if they are convicted by the court for making a false statement knowingly during a PRH application, contrary to Section 26(1)(c) of the Housing Ordinance, the maximum penalty is a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months, while the PRH application will also be cancelled.