

Teaching Topic

The Challenges of Sustaining Public Health : The 'Gutter Oil'¹ Incident

Relevant concepts / terms

- Health (Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies → L & T Resources → Reading Materials for Relevant Concepts → NSS LS)
- International collaboration (in public health) (Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies → L & T Resources → Reading Materials for Relevant Concepts → NSS LS)
- Public Health (Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies → L & T Resources → Reading Materials for Relevant Concepts → NSS LS)
- Food Safety (World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/foodsafety/en/>)
- Food Hygiene (World Health Organization http://www.who.int/foodsafety/areas_work/food-hygiene/en/)
- Gutter Oil (Centre for Food Safety http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew_fst/whatsnew_fst_Substandard_Oil_Produced_in_Taiwan_faqs_Public.html#Q13)

Suggested questions for enquiry

- What is 'gutter oil'? Why is it produced? How does it affect consumers' health?
- One of Hong Kong companies is suspected of involving in the 'gutter oil' incident in Taiwan by selling problematic lard² to a Taiwanese edible oil firm. Evaluate the impact of the 'gutter oil' incident on Hong Kong. Justify your answer. (Hints: Tarnishing Hong Kong's reputation, weakening consumers' confidence, etc.)
- Identify and elaborate on three difficulties for the Hong Kong Government to minimize the negative impacts brought by the 'gutter oil' incident.
- The globalization of the food trade, the heightened consumers' expectations on food safety and the advancement in food technology have made the Hong Kong Government's work of food safety management increasingly challenging. Describe the challenges that the Hong Kong Government is facing.
- To ensure food safety, a mutual notification system has been established between the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of China and the Centre for Food safety, HKSAR. Analyse its role

¹ 'Gutter oil' refers to all kinds of inferior quality oil, like hogwash oil, waste fried oil, food offal and waste grease from related enterprises. (For details, please refer to <http://www.foodsafety.gov.mo/e/sense/detail.aspx?id=617f44e4-62ff-4db5-a718-b9ac2cecc2fc>) In Taiwan, 'Gutter oil' is translated into '餿水油', '劣質豬油' or '地溝油'.

² A Hong Kong company is suspected of selling the lard which is intended for animal feed or industrial use to the Taiwanese firm as an ingredient of edible oil. (For more details, please refer to <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1590967/lard-oil-incident-tarnishes-hong-kongs-reputation-ko-wing-man-says>)

and functions and evaluate its effectiveness on safeguarding food safety.

Suggested examples for enquiry provided by Resource Package (*Resource Package* P.84 and 87)

- Hong Kong experienced an outbreak of the bubonic plague (Black Death) in the late 19th century. The government adopted a series of measures to fight the diseases.
- The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Atypical Pneumonia, SARS) epidemic broke out in Hong Kong in 2003. To prevent the epidemic from spreading, the Government introduced a series of preventive measures immediately after the outbreak. The public health awareness of different sectors of society was also improved.

Relevant news/ cases/ data/ commentaries/ pictures (Directly relevant or closely relevant topics)

- Editorial. (2014, Sept 22). 'Strict block on tainted oil to safeguard health and regain credibility.' *Sing Tao Daily*.
- Qi Luo. (2014, Sept 19). 'Tougher controls on cooking oil pledged.' *The Standard*.
- Ernest Kao. (2014, Sept 19). 'New regulations on way after 'gutter oil' scandal.' *South China Morning Post*.
- Ernest Kao. (2014, Sept 18). 'Hong Kong plans tougher laws in response to 'gutter oil' scandal.' *South China Morning Post*.
- The Editorial Board. (2014, Sept 18). 'Taiwan's 'Gutter Oil' Scandal.' *The New York Times*.
- Editorial. (2014, Sept 17). 'Gutter oil problem must be tackled at source'. *Ming Pao*.
- Jeff Bell. (2014, Sept 17). 'Customers the only victims of oil scandal'. *South China Morning Post*.
- Emily Tsang. (2014 Sept 13). 'HK, Taiwan ban all food linked to 'gutter oil' firm'. *South China Morning Post*.
- Editorial. (2014, Sept 12). 'The Taiwanese "gutter oil" scandal'. *Ming Pao*.
- Jennifer Ngo and Lai Ying-kit. (2014, Sept 12). "'Gutter oil' scandal tarnishing Hong Kong's reputation, says health secretary.' *South China Morning Post*.
- Timothy Chui and Kahon Chan. (2014, Sept 11). 'HK begins probe into gutter oil scare'. *China Daily Hong Kong Edition*.
- Elizabeth Barber. (2014, Sept 8). 'Gutter Oil' Scandal Raises Food-Safety Fears Once Again in Greater China.' *TIME*.

- Unknown. (2014, Sept 6). 'Recycled oil does not pose immediate health risk: Taiwan FDA.' *Want China Times*.

Assessment items (Directly relevant or closely relevant topics)

- Food Safety in the Mainland (ED 14)
- New SARS and H7N9 (EE 38)

Learning objects (Directly relevant or closely relevant topics)

- Food Safety and the Intervention of the International Community (LO_2009_0344e)
- Globalization, responsibility, understanding of public health (LO_2009_0318c)
- Debate over the Incident Involving Toxic Chinese-made Toothpaste (LO_2009_0197e)

Relevant or comparable examples for enquiry

- **Suspected contamination of milk formula by *Clostridium botulinum* (肉毒桿菌):** In early August 2013, the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) reported that ingredients suspected contamination by *Clostridium botulinum* were used in the production of a milk formula sold globally. By the end of August, MPI confirmed that the food incident was a false alarm as the bacteria identified posed no food safety concern. It was worthy of enquiry to see how different governments took actions in response to this suspected case on food safety.
 - Centre for Food Safety. (March 2014). 'Review of Food Incidents in 2013.' *Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, HKSAR*. Retrieved from http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/multimedia/multimedia_pub/files/FSF92_2014_03_19.pdf,
 - Bronwyn Torrie. (2013, August 6). 'Suspect baby milk used in neonatal, children's wards'. *NZ Farmer.co.nz*. Retrieved from <http://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/9005193/Suspect-baby-milk-used-in-neonatal-childrens-wards> ,
 - Vir.(2013, August 6). 'Vietnam recalls toxic milk formula across country.' SGGP. Retrieved from <http://www.vietnambreakingnews.com/2013/08/vietnam-recalls-toxic-milk-formula-across-country/>
- **The Widespread Vegetable Contamination in China:** In 2013, it was discovered that one-fifth of the Pearl River Delta's vegetables contain excessive amounts of heavy metals. Traces of lead, chromium, zinc and nickel were also

found in some vegetables. Experts said that such heavy metals can accumulate in the body over years, causing organ and nerve damage, and even cancer. As Guangdong is a source of produce sold in Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety responded that all vegetables brought into Hong Kong from the mainland are from registered farms and processing plants and must be brought through the Man Kam To control point.

- Li Jing and Amy Nip (2013, June 24). 'Pearl River Delta vegetables contain excessive amounts of arsenic, other poisons.' *SCMP*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1267541/heavy-metals-poison-vegetables-pearl-river-delta>
- News Desk. (2013, June 25). 'Vegetables from China's Pearl River Delta "Contaminated".' *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.asianewsnet.net/Vegetables-from-Chinas-Pearl-River-Delta-contamina-48393.html>)

Other resources

- Apple Daily English. (2014, September 5). 'Disgusting: Food Safety Scandal in Taiwan as Gutter Oil Sold as Cooking Oil.' *Apple Daily English*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JsghwKts6Y (Video length: 58 seconds).
- Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. Centre for Food Safety. (2008). *5 keys to food safety: practical tips for public*. Hong Kong: Centre for Food Safety, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. (Hong Kong Public Libraries Call Number: 363.192 FIV)
- Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. Centre for Food Safety. (2008). *5 keys to food safety: handbook for trade*. Hong Kong: Centre for Food Safety, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. (Hong Kong Public Libraries Call Number: 363.192 FIV)
- Food and Feed Safety Alerts – European Commission (RASFF) http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/rasff/index_en.htm
- Food and Health Bureau, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Centre for Food Safety. (July, 2007). *Report of the Work of Centre for Food Safety*. Retrieved from <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/fseh/papers/fe0710cb2-2391-1-e.pdf>
- International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) http://www.who.int/foodsafety/areas_work/infosan/en/
- Knechtges, Paul L. (2012). *Food Safety: theory and practice*. Burlington, Mass.:

Jones & Bartlett Learning. (Hong Kong Public Libraries Call Number: 363.192KNE)

- Lasky, Tamar. (2007). *Epidemiologic principles and food safety*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Hong Kong Public Libraries Call Number: 002854444)
- Substandard Lard Produced in Taiwan. Centre for Food Safety, HKSAR
http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew_fst/whatsnew_fst_Substandard_Oil_Produced_in_Taiwan.html
- World Health Organization. (1989). *Evaluation of programmes to ensure food safety: guiding principles*. Geneva: World Health Organization; Albany, NY: WHO Publications Center USA. (Hong Kong Public Libraries Call Number: 001241564)