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CFIA widens radiation testing, includes B.C. milk

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By: Staff

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Canada's sampling and testing regime for radiation from Japan's nuclear crisis has been expanded to include domestically-produced milk from British Columbia along with food products imported from Japan.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency emphasized in a statement Wednesday that it has yet to detect related radionuclides -- atoms or atomic particles emitting radiation -- at or above Health Canada's "action levels" in any of the products it's sampled.

The expansion of testing to include B.C. milk was described strictly as "a prudent measure (taken) out of an abundance of caution to reaffirm the safety of this dietary staple for the majority of Canadians."

"Negligible" levels of radioactivity have been detected along North America's West Coast, the agency said Wednesday. Radiation levels found on the West Coast are now "less than the natural levels of radiation that would be detected when it rains or snows," CFIA said.

Four samples of domestically-produced milk from B.C. had been tested by Wednesday to verify that milk remains safe for consumption, CFIA said. All were below Health Canada action levels for "pertinent radionuclides."

"Additional products may be assessed in the future as the situation evolves and circumstances warrant," CFIA said.

Imports

Even before the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan on March 11, Japanese food products made up less than 0.3 per cent of Canada's total food imports, and imports from Japan are now at "very low" levels.

So far, CFIA said Wednesday, it has tested nine samples from Japanese food and feed imports and found all products below Health Canada's action levels for radionuclides.

The agency's testing approach targets the commodities that would pose the greatest potential risk to consumers, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, and also includes a broader range of other commodities, CFIA said.

If any products are found with levels above Health Canada's action levels for radionuclides they'd be disposed of following protocols from the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the agency said.

Since April 1, CFIA has blocked entry of any food or feed from Japan without acceptable documentation or test results verifying its safety, if the food or feed comes from any of 12 prefectures affected by the ongoing nuclear crisis. The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) now refers all shipments of food and feed from Japan to CFIA's National Import Service Centre.

Japan is still battling to control nuclear reactors in the country's northeast that were damaged by the quake and tsunami. Workers have recently been able to stop radioactive water leaking into the ocean from the damaged reactors, but experts have said the reactors are still far from being under control.

That said, the Reuters news service on Wednesday quoted a United Nations official as saying the reactor accident is not expected to have any serious impact on people's health, based on the information available now.

Total diet

CFIA noted Wednesday that the federal government already collects information on normal background levels of radionuclides in food as part of Health Canada's total diet study.

The total diet study is a survey used to estimate Canadians' exposure to various contaminants through the food supply. The data collected provides a baseline of the normal levels of such materials in food.

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