

Taiwan gutter oil scandal spreads to Hong Kong

September 8 2014

Pineapple buns and dumplings have been pulled from the shelves in Hong Kong as authorities check whether they contain Taiwanese "gutter oil" which has sparked a growing regional food safety scare, officials said Monday.

An investigation was launched after oil from a Taiwanese company accused of using illegally recycled products—including fat collected from grease traps—was exported to the southern Chinese city.

Taiwanese authorities say a factory in the south of the island illegally used 243 tonnes of tainted products, often referred to as "gutter oil", to mix with lard oil in a case that has reignited regional concerns about food safety.

The lard oil—a clear oil pressed from pig fat—was supplied to at least 900 restaurants and bakeries in Taiwan. The owner of the factory was arrested Sunday.

The scare has now spread to Hong Kong, with local chains forced to pull products from their shelves and experts ramping up spot checks.

Philip Ho, an officer from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, told RTHK radio Monday that dozens of food samples had been taken with results expected in the next few days.

The government's Centre for Food Safety is also conducting tests on

mooncakes from retailers across the city. The pastries are consumed in vast numbers during the Mid-Autumn festival now being celebrated across China.

Popular bakery chain Maxim's Cakes removed pineapple buns from their shelves over the weekend after confirming they had used oil from Chang Guann, the Taiwanese oil manufacturer at the heart of the scandal.

The chain said there was no evidence the lard oil used to make the buns contained tainted products, but it was removing them anyway "to be ultra cautious on food safety". It has since switched to a Dutch supplier.

Dumpling eatery chain Bafang Yunji also pulled its curry dumplings, local broadcaster RTHK reported, while supermarket Wellcome removed two products.

In Macau, the city's Food Safety Centre said 21 bakeries and food manufacturers had bought [oil](#) from Chang Guann through a local importer.

Chang Guann has apologised for the scandal but said it was unaware the oils were recycled.

It is the second [food safety](#) scare to hit Hong Kong this summer.

In July McDonald's suspended sales of chicken nuggets and several other items after admitting it imported food from a US-owned firm in China at the centre of an expired meat scandal.

Shoppers in Hong Kong said they were increasingly concerned about the safety of food, especially imported products.

"It's definitely a problem as it could be really bad for your health," remarked Simon Cheung, a 50-year-old father of two.

"I reckon the problem is not small even if they (retailers) say so."

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