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# Press Release

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## PERIODIC REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE HEALTH INSPECTORATE SERVICES WITHIN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIRECTORATE

The Environmental Health Directorate within the Superintendence of Public Health is making every effort to keep its contact with the public through a monthly press statement. The following is a summary of actions taken during August, 2012.

### SUMMARISED REPORT

The following is a summary of the report hereunder:

- 481 improvement notices were issued during last month;
- 25 outlets visited in the early morning
- 5 undertakings were issued;
- 1070kg of foodstuffs were destroyed;
- 3 products were recalled;
- 11 Legionella audits carried out;
- 17 swimming pools were audited during 8 audits;
- 5 schools inspected;
- 7 abatement notices issued;
- 25 food consignments imported were inspected;
- 2 consignments of tattoo equipment was also withheld;
- 2647 notification for importing/trading food into Malta;
- 21 Ship Sanitation certificates issued;
- 68 applications were processed;
- 993 control cards for narcotics and psychotropic substances were issued;
- 131 illegal tobacco related adverts and 1 illegal tattoo adverts were removed;
- 679 samples were elevated and analysed;
- 8 citations issued/processed;
- 2 Emergency control orders issued;
- 667 complaints lodged with the Health Inspectorate.

### DETAILED REPORT

#### IMPROVEMENT NOTICES ISSUED TO FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS

Four hundred and eighty one improvement notices in terms of article 33 of the Food Safety Act have been issued to food business operators by the Health Inspectorate Services.

This notice is sent to all food business operators following an unannounced inspection by Environmental Health Officers within their establishment. The intention of this notice is to inform food operators about deficiencies noted in their establishments while the operator is given a specific deadline

by when the deficiencies need to be remedied. Though the seriousness of deficiencies might vary, legal action is initiated when major deficiencies are noted.

#### EARLY MORNING INSPECTIONS

Twenty five outlets were also visited by the Health Inspectorate early in the morning as part of a monitoring programme to ascertain hygienic delivery of food in particular dairy products and bread.

#### UNDERTAKINGS

During August, five undertakings were entered into by the Health Inspectorate, two of which were food related and concerned hygiene of food premises, provision of washing facilities, HACCP and on improperly labelled food. Three undertakings were public health related such as pool safety and Legionella control.

Undertakings are legal agreements between the operators and the Health Authority specifying deadlines by which deficiencies in their premises should be remedied in compliance with standing legislation. Failure to abide with the agreed deadlines results in Court proceedings being initiated.

#### DESTRUCTION OF FOOD

During August, 1070kg of different foodstuffs were destroyed by the Health Inspectorate, ranging from:

- 1008kg of frozen lamb due to two durability dates;
- 38.2kg meat products due to risk of contamination;
- 10kg of expired milk and cereals;
- 9kg doughnuts kept in appropriate storage conditions;
- 5kg of breaded fish and pizza bases without any label

#### RECALLS AND OTHER MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

Throughout last month, three food products were implicated in withdrawals/warnings issued by this Directorate, as follows:

- Press Release 1822 issued on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2012 withdrawing two food supplements due to presence of 1,3 DMAA (URL: <http://gov.mt/en/Government/Press%20Releases/Pages/2012/August/21/pr1822.aspx> );
- Press Release 1869 issued on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2012 withdrawing a brand of seaweed due to silica gel in direct contact with the food (URL: <http://gov.mt/en/Government/Press%20Releases/Pages/2012/August/31/pr1869.aspx> )

During the previous month, two media communications were also issued, as follows:

1. Press Release 1746 issued on 7<sup>th</sup> August on foodstuffs sealed from a retailer by the Health Inspectorate (URL: <http://gov.mt/en/Government/Press%20Releases/Pages/2012/August/07/pr1746.aspx> )
2. Press Notice issued on 09<sup>th</sup> August regarding new offices at Sta. Venera

#### LEGIONELLA AUDITS AND POOL INSPECTIONS

Eleven audits at Hotels, and other similar premises to ascertain compliance with Control of Legionella Regulations, 2006 (L.N. 5 of 2006) and the Registration of Cooling Towers and Evaporative Condensers Regulations, 2006 (L.N. 6 of 2006) were performed by the Health Inspectorate during last month.

During the same month, seventeen swimming pools were inspected during eight audits carried out by the Health Inspectorate to verify compliance with Swimming Pools Regulations, 2005 (L.N. 129 of 2005). No pools were registered with the Health Authority during this month. This regulation specifies that all swimming pools with the exception of those situated at a single family residence need to register

with this Directorate. A list of registered pools can be found in the Directorate's website mentioned below.

One new cooling tower was also registered during last month.

#### INSPECTIONS OF SCHOOLS

During August, five schools were inspected to ensure compliance with general hygiene requirements. Such inspections are carried out in private, government or church owned schools and whether, primary, secondary, tertiary or language or special schools.

#### ABATEMENT NOTICES

Seven abatement notices were issued during this month by the Health Inspectorate in terms of the Public Health Act in view of inspections and audits carried out in the previous days.

#### CONSIGNMENTS

Twenty five consignments of food imported/traded into Malta were also inspected during August by Environmental Health Officers attached with the Port Health Services within this Directorate.

Two consignments of tattoo equipment were also withheld by the Port Health Services.

#### CONSIGNMENTS DOCUMENTARY CHECKS

2,647 requests for importation/trading of foodstuffs were submitted to the Port Health Services as required by Trading Regulations of 2004 (Legal Notice 315 of 2004 which can be downloaded from <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11120&l=1> ).

All traders of food including food contact materials and food supplements are reminded to notify the Port Health Services, 48hours in advance as explained in Press Release 1531 issued on 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2011 (URL: [http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press\\_releases/2011/08/pr1531.pdf](http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2011/08/pr1531.pdf) ).

#### SHIP SANITATION CERTIFICATES

During August, twenty one Ship Sanitation Certificates were issued by the Port Health Services. Such inspections are carried out in terms of the International Health Regulations of 2005 and involves the assessment of the general hygienic conditions and control measures undertaken on ships. Such certificate needs to be renewed every 6 months at an authorised port; Malta being an authorised port.

#### APPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

During August, the Health Inspectorate received 68 requests to process applications to operate food and non-food business. Prospective operators who wish to open such businesses are obliged to apply for a permit with the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) and then apply for the actual licence with the competent authority such as the Trade Licensing Unit or Malta Tourism Authority. At every stage, this Directorate is consulted in order to verify suitability of proposed premises.

During the same month, Environmental Health Officers deployed with the Food Safety Unit, which is involved in the licensing of food related business carried out a total of 88 visits and one consultation.

#### CONTROL CARDS FOR NARCOTIC AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES

During August, 993 control cards for narcotic and psychotropic substances (608 females and 385 males) were issued by the Drug Control Unit, which is another unit falling under the Health Inspectorate Services. 171 of these cards were new applicants.

These cards are issued when a medical doctor deems that a person needs to be prescribed a psychotropic drug. An application form is filled in and handed over to the patient which is in turn submitted to the Drug Control Unit, Shop 12, City Gate, Valletta Tel; 21245490.

#### ILLEGAL ADVERTISEMENTS

During August, 131 adverts involving Tobacco products and including electronic cigarettes in breach of Tobacco (Smoking Control) Act were noticed on local sites and the respective advertisers and webmasters were instructed to remove, something which was actually complied with.

Two adverts of tattoo equipment were also noticed in contravention of the Control of Tattooing Act.

#### SAMPLES

During August, 679 samples were elevated by the Health Inspectorate and submitted to the Public Health Laboratory for analysis and/or examination for several parameters;

- 82 food samples,
- 55 potable water samples,
- 46 swabs,
- 66 infiltration water samples,
- 5 pool water samples,
- 412 sea water samples,
- 13 other samples.

During this year, the Directorate has launched 18 microbiological sampling programmes and 37 chemical sampling programmes targeting several parameters in numerous categories of foodstuffs such as colours, aflatoxins, GMOs, radionucleides, etc.

#### BATHING WATER MONITORING PROGRAMME

During the month of August, 412 samples of sea water were collected and submitted to the Public Health Laboratory to be analysed for microbiological parameters as stipulated by EU Directive 2006/7/EC. The bathing water monitoring programme is carried out in accordance with the provisions of said EU Directive. The official bathing season started on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012 and will last till the 21<sup>st</sup> October 2012. Sampling is carried out from 87 official bathing sites throughout the Maltese islands.

Up to the 16<sup>th</sup> week of the monitoring programme the 87 sites have been classified as follows: 85 sites as Excellent Quality, 1 site as Good Quality, 1 site as Sufficient and no sites as Poor Quality.

#### CONTRAVENTIONS

During this month, eight contraventions were issued/processed by the Health Inspectorate, all of which were related to food safety issues:

- Operators of several establishments within a complex and a retailer for not adhering with undertakings entered into.
- Two retailers for lack of traceability, processing of food without licence, lack of hygiene requirements, and labelling irregularities
- One operator for not complying with an Emergency Control Order issued this year;
- One wholesaler for selling foodstuffs past their use by date, lack of traceability, improper labelling and for carrying out a food business without being registered with the Food Safety Commission;
- One operator for failing to inform the authorities on consignment of food as per Press Release 1531 issued on 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2011 (URL: [http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press\\_releases/2011/08/pr1531.pdf](http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2011/08/pr1531.pdf) ).

- One retailer for selling foodstuffs past their use by date.

#### EMERGENCY CONTROL ORDERS

During August, two emergency control orders were issued due to illegal activities.

#### EMERGENCY PROHIBITION ORDERS

During August, no emergency prohibition orders were issued and hence no premises were closed down.

#### COMPLAINTS

In August, 667 complaints were lodged with the Directorate which were categorised in one or more category, as follows:

- Food related complaints

97 complaints were related to food. The most common type of food complaints concerned hygiene of food premises (24 complaints), fitness of food (12 complaints), food poisoning allegations and storage of food with 7 complaints each.

- Other Environmental Health related complaints

Another 633 complaints were environmental health related. The most common type concerned presence of pests (181 complaints), infiltrations (94 complaints), accumulations of refuse (63 complaints), discharge of foul water (40 complaints), foul smells (39 complaints) and leakage/defective drains (28 complaints)

Note: The number of complaints and the number of categories do not tally, since one complaint received may encompass one or more categories.

The Environmental Health Directorate takes this opportunity to remind the public that it can contact the Health Inspectorate Services between 7:00am and 3:00pm on telephone number 21337333, by calling personally at its offices at Continental Business Centre, Cutrico Buildings, Old Railway Track, Santa Venera or by email [complaints.ph@gov.mt](mailto:complaints.ph@gov.mt).

For further information, the public is also encouraged to visit the Directorate's website at URL: [https://ehealth.gov.mt/HealthPortal/public\\_health/environmental-health/department\\_for\\_env\\_health.aspx](https://ehealth.gov.mt/HealthPortal/public_health/environmental-health/department_for_env_health.aspx) or on its facebook page on <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Environmental-Health-Directorate-Malta/145027878928626>